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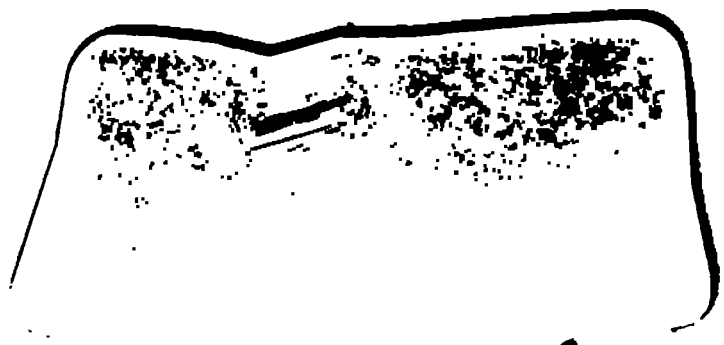
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The Year of the Church.

A COURSE OF SERMONS

BY THE LATE

REV. RICHARD WEBSTER HUNTLEY, M.A.,

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AND VICAR OF ALBERBURY, SALOP;
AND FOR ELEVEN YEARS PROCTOR IN CONVOCATION
FOR THE CLERGY OF THE DIOCESE
OF GLOUCESTER AND BRISTOL;

WITH

A Short Memoir

BY THE EDITOR,

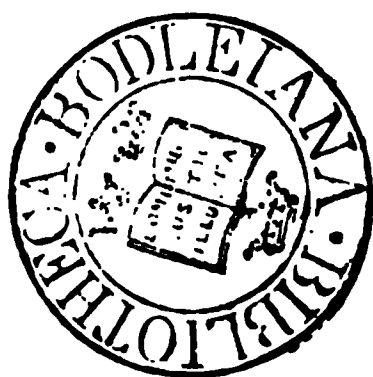
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TO THE
PARISHIONERS OF BOXWELL AND LEIGHTERTON
THE FOLLOWING WISE AND LOVING ADMONITIONS,
ONCE "SPOKEN TO THEM FACE TO FACE,"
ARE RESPECTFULLY INSCRIBED BY THE EDITOR,
IN REMEMBRANCE OF HIM
WHOSE CONSTANT LABOUR AND PRAYER IT WAS
THAT HE MIGHT "TEACH THEM THE GOOD AND RIGHT WAY"
AS IT IS IN JESUS CHRIST OUR LORD.

P R E F A C E.

THE following Sermons (as written by one who lived amongst the agricultural poor) enter into no controversies, except on points which are actually controverted amongst them, or with respect to which at least they stand in immediate need of instruction and warning, e. g. the question of faith and works. Still less do they contain any *display* of strong religious feeling, for the author was one to whom it was natural to veil to a great degree his strongest and deepest emotions; but on a careful perusal it will be evident to every impartial reader, that they were written by one, who not only knew well what kind of instruction the poor are able to receive, and on what points they need admonition, but who had also a deep and practical acquaintance with the work of God in the heart of man.

M e m o i r
OF THE
REV. R. W. HUNTLEY.

THE writer of the following Sermons is one, whose loss will be long and sadly felt by many of all ranks of society, and in all the various callings in life, around that home, where his death has made an irreparable void.

Gifted by nature with great powers both of reason and imagination, and singularly fitted to please in society, he spent his life in the study of men rather than of books. His theological reading was limited chiefly to his Bible and Prayer-book, and to a few of the works of our standard writers of practical divinity; but at the same time it is very remarkable that no man could have a stronger and more distinct view of the necessity of maintaining the dogmatic and authoritative teaching of the Church.

As a wise and affectionate parish priest, and a shrewd observer of all the secret workings of the human heart; full of tenderness and sympathy towards every member of his little flock, and towards all his numerous personal friends, in their trials, their

needs, and their distresses; earnest and anxious in applying the true remedies to the diseases of their souls, he saw distinctly, vividly, that in order to preserve and strengthen the consolatory and ruling influence of religion over men's hearts, it is absolutely necessary to maintain one fixed and plain standard of divine teaching and Scriptural interpretation, which they can trust.

Such a standard he believed to have been given us in the Prayer-book and Articles of our Church, and nothing distressed and alarmed him so much as any attempt (from whatever quarter it might come) to explain away positive and distinct statements in these formularies for the sake of allowing diversity of teaching on points, that are therein represented as matters of divine revelation and articles of saving faith.

The representative of an ancient and loyal race, which had suffered severely for its faithful adherence to the Church and to the Crown under the protracted and apparently hopeless trials of the Great Rebellion, he had learned from his youth to regard strict and direct truthfulness under all circumstances, and in relation to all engagements, as a principle so essentially sacred and vital, that he could not bear being by any means implicated in anything that looked to him like tampering with it.

At the same time, towards those who most entirely

differed from him in principles either of religion or politics, he always kept up a kind and friendly feeling, and was willing to make due allowance for the effects of different training and for different habits of thought, however quick he was in detecting and able in exposing with perfect good humour what appeared to him to be inconsistent, absurd, or unreal.

He completed his education at Oriel College, Oxford, where he entered as a gentleman-commoner in the year 1812. He was elected Fellow of All Souls in the year 1815, and was presented by his college to the living of Alberbury, in the county of Salop, and in the diocese of Hereford, A.D. 1829, and became Rector of Boxwell and Leighterton, his family living, on the death of his father in 1831.

In the year 1830 he married Mary, eldest daughter of the late Richard Lyster, Esq., of Rowton Castle, in Salop, by whom he has two sons.

In 1838 he returned to the dwelling of his ancestors after an absence of several years. A large proportion of his parishioners were his own tenants, and both as landlord, and in the higher relation of pastor, he made their welfare the great object of his care and labours.

In consequence of the continual and close intercourse he kept up with them, he knew what trains of thought they were capable of following, and what

language they could most easily understand, better than any one whom it has ever been the writer's lot to know. He entered into all their troubles, and was always ready to give them kind and judicious advice in such difficulties, as might at any time occasion them uneasiness or perplexity.

Living on the Cotswolds, at a place where the old dialect of that part of the country had been preserved more pure and entire than in almost any other, it was his principal relaxation to study it, and to compare many expressions still in common use in that district with the language of poets and popular writers of two or three centuries past. Indeed, he had with that particular object carefully examined many works of that date, some of them books that are scarce and difficult to be obtained. It would be impossible for the writer to describe, how interesting it was to hear him speak on this subject, so earnest and sincere was his conviction, that amongst the poor in these agricultural districts were to be found remains of a genuine Saxon language, both purer and more forcible than any now in use amongst the wealthier classes of society.

Indeed, one marked and beautiful feature in his character was his heartfelt respect, or, I would rather say, his reverence, for the homely but sterling virtues of the honest English farmer and peasant. It was

his thorough appreciation of their character that enabled him to exercise so great an influence as he undoubtedly did exercise over almost all persons of that class with whom he came into contact; while at the same time there have been few persons whose society has been more enjoyed and coveted by persons in his own situation in life, both laity and clergy.

To what extent he possessed the esteem and confidence of his brother clergymen will appear from the fact that at the very first opportunity after his return to the diocese, he was, in 1841, at the demise of Dr. Cooke, chosen unanimously their Proctor in Convocation.

In the movements for the restoration of that part of our constitution he always took the very deepest interest, and he spared no exertion to promote it. At the close of his life, in the month of April, in the year 1857, when decaying health and warnings of the uncertainty of his life (of which he probably knew more than he told to others) led him to resign his seat, he expressed his great satisfaction that during those few years so much progress had been made towards giving life and action to the synods of the Church. He entertained a strong conviction that Parliament, whatever it had been once, had become of late years, from various causes, a very unfit body to legislate, with so little *real* check or

control, in matters concerning the well-being, and even sometimes the most sacred interests, of the Church. And, though attached to the supremacy of the Crown within its due limits, he felt very strongly that this supremacy ought to be exercised by the sovereign in person, and with the advice of ecclesiastical bodies and persons, and that it ought not to be given up into the hands of the ministers assigned to the Crown by the House of Commons, who might be attached to any or to no form of religious belief.

In the Hampden question (as it is called) he was led to take a prominent part, as well from the circumstance of his being a member of that University, which had on two occasions so decidedly pronounced her distinct condemnation of Dr. Hampden, as also because he was an incumbent of a living in that diocese over which Dr. Hampden was appointed to preside, and, above all, on account of his entertaining that strong conviction, which has been already mentioned as underlying his whole system of belief, that the doctrines embodied in the Prayer-book and the Articles were of vital importance to men's salvation, and that therefore all the Church at large, but the clergy most especially, would incur a very fearful responsibility if they betrayed the trust committed to them, and allowed those truths to be in any respect tampered with or explained away.

It appeared clear and certain to his truthful and

penetrating mind, that Dr. Hampden's principles (though professedly, and no doubt in the Bishop's own view, opposed only to the received *language* of the Church of England,) did in fact tend to undermine the *doctrines*, which have been always expressed in that language.

He did not hesitate, therefore, to join with all the energy of his heart in that stand which a large and influential body of the clergy and laity of the Church made in various ways against that appointment, and was one of the three clergymen who appeared as opponents to the confirmation of Dr. Hampden's election, both at Bow Church, and before the judges of the Queen's Bench. And it surely deserves to be remembered that these opponents by their determination and zeal obtained this at least,—though the election was not set aside,—that it is left now an undecided point, whether their charges ought not to have been heard, and whether for the time to come the members of the English Church have not a right to lay before the Archbishop any charge of heresy or immorality, they may be able to substantiate against a person whom the Crown has caused to be elected to a bishopric.

He was appointed, by the late Bishop of Gloucester and Bristol, Rural Dean of Hawkesbury and Bitton in the year 1840, which office he held until the year 1851, when he resigned it, after having

discharged the duties of it for eleven years, with an impartiality and uprightness, an energy, ability, and kindness of heart, which were appreciated both by his diocesan and by the clergy over whom he presided.

During the period when he was both Rural Dean and Proctor in Convocation, he took an active part in the efforts that were made by Churchmen for the preservation of the Welsh bishopric, then threatened with extinction, for the purpose of endowing out of its revenues a new see for the wealthy city of Manchester.

The great, indeed I might say the only, argument that could be adduced for the apparently outrageous proposition, was, that a fusion of the dioceses of Gloucester and Bristol, similar to that then proposed between St. Asaph and Bangor, had been effected without any objection or complaint on the part of the clergy or laity of these dioceses, with a view to the establishment of a new see for the West Riding of Yorkshire at Ripon. And indeed this argument was distinctly alleged in the House of Lords by the Duke of Wellington, and by the late Bishop of London, as a justification of the intended suppression of St. Asaph.

However, upon Mr. Huntley's appealing to his constituents, the clergy of the united diocese, to *ascertain their real view* of this matter, 176 of them

came forward and declared publicly that however grateful they felt for their bishop's unwearied exertions and endeavours to fulfil the onerous duties thus imposed upon him, they were convinced the work was more than one man could adequately perform, and that the union that had taken place was sure to prove prejudicial to the interests of the Church in the new diocese thus formed.

At the same time, Mr. Huntley published a letter on the subject addressed to the Archbishop of Canterbury, in which he pointed out strongly what a dangerous precedent it was, and how completely opposed to the mind of the clergy of the Church of England, so much so that when an address to the Queen had been sent down from the bishops to the Lower House for their concurrence, containing a clause recognising and assenting to the commission and its acts, that clause was (without any attempt either at modification or abatement of terms) absolutely and entirely thrown out. To this letter Lord Powis referred in the House of Lords, and adopted the arguments of it, amongst his reasons for resisting this attempt to make this second forced union in Wales.

This letter, together with the representation of the clergy to which I have referred, had such an effect on the episcopal bench, and on the public mind at large, that the Archbishop found only one bishop to sup-

port him in the House of Lords, in opposing the bill to prevent the intended suppression ; after which he submitted, with that kindness of heart which characterised all he did, to the clearly expressed wishes of the Church, and Wales preserved her four bishoprics, while Manchester still became an episcopal seat.

But while Mr. Huntley never shrank from maintaining those principles which he believed to be true, he always professed them in a spirit at once so frank and kindly, and so truthful and hearty, that even where he did not succeed in gaining over others to coincide with him in his views, he never, I believe, failed to command their esteem and regard.

And in his society, all, even those who most differed from him in opinion, were sure to find what would interest and please them. A rich mine of genuine and kindly humour, a quick fancy, a wonderful, almost unparalleled power of invention, a great command of language in conversation, together with his sincere and ready sympathy for the feelings of all with whom he had any intercourse, and, more especially, his perfect abhorrence of affectation, made him to all men one of the most lively and delightful companions that the writer has ever known.

And as companionship ripened into intimacy and friendship, it was beautiful and most touching to *observe how heartily and completely* he made the

joys and sorrows of his friends his own. The writer can never forget seeing him once quite overcome in speaking of the anxieties of a friend about his sons at that time serving in the trenches before Sebastopol, of whom the father had been talking just before with natural concern, yet with perfect calmness. The genuineness, the depth and earnestness of his affections, together with the truthfulness and integrity of his character, made him one whom it seems to us, as men, hard to spare out of a world where such qualities, alas, are too uncommon, and where they exercise such a blessed effect in shedding brightness and comfort around them. But it is surely a well-founded consolation to those who grieve for the loss of friends like these, to think that when we fix the eyes of our mind on that perfect Model that is set before us in the New Testament, the great thing that breaks forth from His human character, and rivets our affections to the Man, is overflowing pity, and sympathy in the purest truth. When we call to mind the "Weep not" to the widow on whom He had compassion, the tears shed out of sympathy for the sorrows of Lazarus' sisters and friends, even when He was by a miracle of mercy to turn that sorrow into joy, we are led to the conclusion that truthful and tender compassion is a most essential part of that Image of God in Man, set forth to us *by the Incarnation of His Divine Person*. And

hence it would seem to follow, that those Christians, who are most full of such real sympathy are those who partake most largely of His indwelling, and of the graces of His Spirit, and that these, being cleansed from their sins in His Blood, and made perfect by the power of the Holy Ghost, will be at the last accepted in Him ; and as they have shared His sorrows in His afflicted members, so will they then be admitted to enter into the joy of their Lord.

And by this loving sympathy they, too, become in their degree models to us, that we may seek by God's grace to be followers of them, even as they are of Christ.

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SERMON I.

First Sunday in Advent.

ST. MATTHEW xxi. 13.

My house shall be called the house of prayer, but ye have made it a den of thieves.

ADVENT Sunday is the beginning of the Christian year. The Church opens her year by preparing her people, during four successive Sabbaths, for the celebration of the day on which she commemorates the birth of her Lord and Founder.

Every stated and returning period has, in itself, a certain solemnity and awfulness. On every such occasion the mind is, in a manner, compelled to remember that another portion of her earthly existence has passed away; and so she can hardly avoid asking herself the question, how much time may still be in store for her, ere the judgment cometh? These thoughts very naturally introduce the past events of life; and what has "been done," and what has been "left undone," are then ready to stand out, and to pass in review before us. Whenever these thoughts are awakened, the mind of man will, in some degree, be touched; the heart, in some degree, will be humbled, and will turn towards prayer;

repentance is then likely to be renewed, and grace to be therefore refreshed.

But if every returning period or solemnity brings with it almost unavoidably these feelings so useful to the soul, how much more does every religious period enforce such thoughts upon us ! This is one reason, among many, why the Church of the Lord Jesus has, in her services, many appointed solemnities. They are in themselves special calls, by reminding us of particular events and direct revelations, all necessary to our salvation, or leading towards it. They also act upon our minds as so many fixed and stated periods in our yearly course, where we may rest and reflect on what the Lord has commanded, and also on the obedience which we have shewn to His commandments. It is of the mercy of God, that our minds are so framed that we feel inclined of ourselves alone, and almost by the force of nature, to appoint and to distinguish certain remarkable times and seasons ; times which call the mind away from its common thoughts, and turn it back again on itself and its doings, and, by setting remembrance in action, bring in the fear of the Lord. Every wise man turns these periods into occasions of serious self-examination ; the Christian hails them with humility, but also with thankfulness, because they bring the Lord Christ before him with a renewed freshness ; and thus, while they strengthen and support his faith, they also tend to enlarge his hopes.

Of the many returning periods in the Church services, none returns upon us with more peculiar calls for thought and self-searching than this season of Advent. The last Christian year has now passed by, and the Church is opening another. The heart then must feel that the end of this new year may find it in the grave; it must feel thankful that punishments too well deserved have not hitherto been inflicted; that mercies altogether undeserved have still been bestowed; that the greatest mercy of all is still extended to us, namely, that life has been continued, and that we are still enabled to accept grace, to cast off sin, and to make ourselves more ready and better fitted for our judgment. At this period, also, we know that in a short time the Table of the Lord will again be spread, and that Christ's priests will call the people into Communion with Him. This knowledge leads the soul to ask in what better hope she will "partake of that Bread and drink of that Cup," whether, since last Christmas, she has increased in good deeds, and stands stronger in faith, or whether she has made no Christian progress, or has even fallen away backwards.

Some there are—alas, my brethren, are they not many?—who are now called on to consider whether they shall turn away from that Table again, and shall once more hear the invitation to come with heedless ears, whether they will again neglect this call, whether they will now give up their sins, or again give up their God. Each of us is called on

to remember that this is an “appointed time;” appointed by the Church established by the Lord Jesus Christ; appointed that we may prepare ourselves for the coming solemnity, the celebration of the day of the birth of Christ in this world; appointed that by prayer, by self-examination, by repentance, and by forgiveness, we may do our part to purify our hearts, and so may endeavour to meet the Lord at His Table in the hope of a Christian, and may obtain by Christ’s mercy greater comfort and refreshment of spirit.

The present season will very naturally bring all these observations into your minds. But when we come to consider the text which the Church has to-day ordered to be read to you, you will find that such thoughts are also to be drawn from the words before us. “My house shall be called the house of prayer, but ye have made it a den of thieves.” With these words, as we have heard in the portion of the Gospel of St. Matthew appointed for the Communion Service of this day, our Lord drove out from the temple the “money-changers,” and those who “sold doves.” The precincts and the courts of the temple had long been much disgraced by the extortions and unfair dealings which were practised there by these people.

Their traffic arose in this way. If you read the fifth chapter of Leviticus, you will find that many expensive and burdensome sacrifices were enjoined by Moses to be observed by the whole Jewish people.

These sacrifices consisted in oxen, heifers, sheep, lambs, goats, and turtle-doves. All these animals were brought into the temple, and there, by order of God, were slain. Part of them were given to the priests for their sustenance, the other parts were burnt in sacrifice before the Lord. Such was the command of God; and He was pleased, of His free grace, when with "true faith and penitent hearts" these sacrifices were duly offered, to accept the observance of these sacred ceremonies in expiation either of the general sins of the whole nation, or of the particular sins of such repentant souls as thus bowed themselves down before Him. These sacrifices were, no doubt, intended to foreshew the great redeeming Sacrifice of our Lord Jesus Christ, Who also for the faithful and penitent spirit has been offered up and accepted by the Godhead as her Sacrifice, and Expiation, and the pardon of her sin.

You will, however, at once see that these sacrifices brought a very considerable expense and trouble upon the persons whose obedient and pious feelings led them up to the temple to make such costly offerings. This expense was increased also from another cause,—the Lord expressly claimed for Himself in sacrifice the choicest and the best of the flocks and herds. The animals offered up on His altar were commanded to be without spot or blemish, of perfect form and stature, foreshewing the perfectness of Him, Who was to be offered up for all. But in addition to the costliness of consuming by fire

the first of the fatlings and the best of the herds, there was also the expense and trouble of bringing them up to the temple to be sacrificed. Many of the Jews lived at a distance from Jerusalem, and these had to bring up their burnt-offerings from remote situations in the country; this necessarily increased the expenses of these religious observances. From these causes it came to pass that, by degrees, certain persons began to provide the oxen, the sheep, the goats, and doves, with the other animals which were commanded by the laws of Moses. These they kept in readiness in the outer courts of the temple, so that those persons whose piety led them up to sacrifice were spared the labour and risk of bringing the cattle with them from a distance, but finding them and purchasing them on the spot, were enabled to observe the rites of their religion with the same satisfaction to their own consciences, and with far less personal trouble and hazard.

However, from this arrangement another practice arose which is also alluded to in the text. As those Jews who came up from a distance frequently brought with them the money of the foreign nations near which they dwelt, and among whom they traded, it became often a matter of doubt, when they were purchasing the animals for sacrifice, what was the exact value of the coin which they offered in payment. This circumstance led to many altercations and difficulties between the buyers and sellers, and, from ignorance or design, sometimes one party found

himself a loser, sometimes the other. In the end a third party arose, who were called the "money-changers." These persons made themselves acquainted with the real value of every coin, whether it was foreign or of their own country; and by their means the necessary purchases were carried on with more ease and security. It was their business to have with them always a stock of the current coin of the realm, and as they had ascertained beforehand the value of every coin which was likely to be offered to their notice, they could readily change it into the money of the country, and in this manner they made the dealings between the buyer and the seller of animals used in sacrifice much more safe and easy; while, by taking a small sum as a recompence for their trouble, when they made the necessary exchange of coins, they were themselves sufficiently profited in their calling. Now, as long as this traffic went on fairly, and was conducted in an equitable and just manner, doubtless no sin was committed on either side, nor was there any offence in the sight of God.

But the wise man writes,—“Sin sticketh close between buying and selling^a,” and we must conclude that honesty had long been left out of sight when our Saviour, at the time mentioned in the text, came into the temple. That sin had largely entered into the dealings in the courts of the temple is very plain,

^a Eccles. xxvii. 2.

both from the wrath which the Lord displayed when He drove them forth, and also from the language which He addressed to them. Probably the owners of the animals, by agreeing among themselves, were accustomed to extort from those who purchased very exorbitant and unfair prices; it is likely that they took unfair advantages of such as had come from far and were unprovided with beasts for the altar, and defrauded them by their exactions in a shameful manner. So also we may suppose that the money-changers demanded far more profit for their assistance than they were entitled to in equity, and by denying the purity or undervaluing the worth of the coin presented for exchange, they were in the habit of robbing the persons whose piety had brought them to sacrifice in the temple. These extortions and unfair practices were sufficient in themselves to have called down the wrath of God upon them.

But it is the natural course of every sin to become the parent of sin, and to produce other evil consequences besides itself. In proportion as the money-changers defrauded, in proportion as the price of the animals was increased, so in exact proportion was the difficulty of sacrificing to the Lord God increased also. These persons were, in such cases, guilty of discouraging the pious feelings and the repentant atonements of all who frequented the temple, by making their religious duties more burdensome and difficult than they ought to have been. Moreover, in some cases it is likely that they might

put a stop to any expression of religious service or repentance altogether. Many a poor man, we may believe, must have come totally unable to give more than the just and reasonable price for his lamb or his turtle doves, totally unable to make any purchase at all if the money-changers either denied the real worth of his coin, or demanded too great a recompence for their assistance. In every case of these iniquitous proceedings they laid a heavy tax on the expression of piety and on the working of repentance as ordered by the law of Moses; in some cases it is likely that they might positively step in between the penitent heart and the Lord his God, and by their exactions and frauds might deny him all power of humiliation and obedience. Such was their guilty conduct towards their neighbour.

How did it act upon themselves? Naturally they grew harder and harder in their hearts, more and more iniquitous. Seated before the very temple itself, they carried on their wicked traffic, and uttered their falsehoods, and performed their cheats in the very earshot of the Lord God Himself, and, as it were, even before His eyes. They put hindrances in the way of God's service, while they were immediately before His face; and looked out anxiously for the humble heart and the contrite spirit, that they might make a pillage, a profit, and an extortion out of repentance and prayer!

Is it to be thought, my brethren, that these men prayed much themselves? Are we to suppose that

they offered up repentant sacrifices? Were these the men who entered the temple, who approached the altar? Did their knees bend, did their hearts bow down, did their mouths pour forth confessions and prayers from a burdened conscience? These men, like the rest of the people, were sinners; it was their duty to have made their humiliations, their sacrifices, and their atonements, and then it would have been their privilege to have carried away with them an assuring hope of forgiveness, and a confident expectation of assisting grace. But what were duties, what were privileges to such men as these? Religion was for them a cause for gain, not a call for repentance and a wounded spirit. The tender consciences, the humble confessions, the trembling prayers of others were to them a spoliation and a traffic. Avarice and extortion are twin-sisters, they are "the daughters of the horseleech^b," and their unceasing cry is "Give, give;" their remissions, their kindnesses, their tender feelings are never seen!

The wrath, then, which moved our Lord to chase away these fallen men from His Father's temple, which led Him to scourge these false dealers, who fattened on the pieties of their brethren, is not to be wondered at. His "zeal for His Father's house^c" took possession of Him, and we can easily understand how just the feeling was; we can readily go

^b Prov. xxx. 15.

^c John ii. 17.

forward with the Lord Jesus in His indignation, and we can plainly see and agree in the truth of His scornful rebuke, "It is written, My house is the house of prayer, but ye have made it a den of thieves."

We have now seen the character of these "money-changers" and of those "who sold doves" in the temple, and we have learnt also how just and righteous was that wrath which moved the Lord to chase them from the house of God. But these words "are written for our learning," and though we are neither "money-changers" nor "sell doves in the temple," yet the Church intends them to do us good, and she wishes that we may apply them to ourselves. In one sense, and in a sense which the New Testament forces in strong but most gracious terms upon our notice, we may apply them to ourselves, as it were, in a literal manner. In many parts of the New Testament we ourselves are called "the temples of the Lord." These most gracious words are used by St. Paul in his first Epistle to the Corinthians in the plainest manner, both of the whole Church collectively, and of each single member of it, who is in a state of grace:—"Know ye not that ye are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you? If any man defile the temple of God, him shall God destroy; for the temple of God is holy, which temple ye are^d." In

^d 1 Cor. iii. 16, 17; vi. 19.

the sixth chapter of the same Epistle the same figure is again insisted on:—“Know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost?” The same doctrine is clearly implied in our Lord’s gracious promise, which you will read in St. John’s Gospel, “Jesus answered and said, If a man love Me, he will keep My words, and My Father will love him, and we will come unto him, and make our abode with him^e.”

These, and all such-like passages, shew us that in our bosoms the Holy Ghost, unless we reject Him and cast Him out, will abide and dwell. These words declare that which in the Sacrament of Baptism is indicated and taught, that they who are accepted into the Church of Christ receive in their hearts God’s Holy Spirit, to continue with them and to guide them through this life, even into forgiveness, through Christ, and peace hereafter. It is in this sense we are called the temples of the Lord, because we may continue to be thus inhabited, and comforted, and sanctified by His sacred Spirit indwelling in us.

Now, then, in the opening of the Christian year, the Church would have us ask if this is the case with ourselves? Are we, in this sense, the temples of God? “It is written, My house shall be called the house of prayer:” this is one of the names, one of the marks of the temple; is it a mark which

^e John xiv. 23.

befits us? Are our bosoms "the house of prayer?" Does prayer really dwell there? If it does, the voice of prayer proceedeth from us every morning and every night, and on many occasions both in the day and in the night. Whenever we think on our wants, whenever we are dismayed by our difficulties, whenever we think upon our blessings, our comforts, and our hopes, prayer straightway and fervently lifts up her voice. Prayer beseeches God to bless our friends, our kindred, and our families; prayer beseeches God for pardon and forbearance whenever we look within, and think of ourselves; when we see sin, prayer entreats that we may be kept from falling; when we see death, that we may be pitied in our judgment; in every hope, in every fear, in every sorrow, in every joy, in every case that can befall us, prayer being really with us, cries constantly unto the Lord our God. If there is the spirit of prayer within you, which without ceasing looks to God in all things, sees the Lord in all things, and stays herself always upon the Lord Christ, then, no doubt, you are abiding with God, and your bosoms are the temples of the Holy Ghost.

But are these things so, or are your hearts but "a den of thieves?" Greediness and falsehood were the thieves which the Lord Christ drove from His Father's house; but these are not the only evil spirits which may infest our hearts. We may be greedy, we may be false, very many are; but we may be uncharitable, we may be malicious, we may

be intemperate, we may be unclean, sinners in many ways, some or all of these sinful tempers may dwell in our bosoms; if so, we have made our hearts "a den of thieves!"

My brethren, tremble as you think that having been admitted into covenant with Jesus Christ, you still have the power to break the covenant! Tremble as you remember that having received the Holy Ghost, having received "the Spirit of adoption, whereby ye cry unto God, Abba, Father^f," you still have the power to cast that Spirit out. Every sin which is wilfully entertained in the heart will cast out the Spirit of God; you remember that the ark and Dagon could not rest together upon the same altar; either Christ must be exalted, or Satan must be exalted, you cannot entertain both in one bosom; the Lord "is a jealous God," and will not rule in a divided kingdom. These are thoughts which may be very well drawn from the text before us. They are thoughts also which never can come amiss while we are in this life of trial, and while we carry deceiving hearts in our bosoms.

We are now entering, in the Church Calendar, a new year. My brethren, ask yourselves honestly, did grace or sin rule in your hearts and members last year, Christ or the thieves? If the thieves, what will be stolen? You, yourselves, your own immortal souls! If Christ, what will be saved?

^f Rom. viii. 15.

own immortal souls! Do not let these things pass as things in uncertainty, but "examine yourselves, whether ye be in the faith; prove your yourselves."

If your lives have been intemperate, careless, half-hearted, unimpressed, dishonest, unchaste; if some of these sins, all of them, or any others, have been retained by you, you may smite upon your breasts, and say without doubting, "it is a den of thieves."

If that is the case, then in prayer, in honest, fervent, and repentant prayer to Christ, you must purge these sins out, or you will be lost.

My brethren, self-examination—so frail is every man—will always bring in confession of sin and prayer for forgiveness. These things will cleanse the breast, and so will lighten the conscience. Moreover, if you will never let drop self-examination; if you will never stifle prayer for Christ's guidance and forgiveness; if you will never again cast behind you the good movements of the Spirit, such of us as shall meet here again when this season shall again return upon us, (for that we shall all meet again next Advent Sunday under this roof will not be granted, —some of us are now here for the last time,)—but such of us as shall be called together again when this day comes round again, having searched their hearts diligently, and followed after Christ in prayer, will find that their hearts have been purified; they

will find that their bad feelings and desires, the wicked inmates, have been chased out and driven forth by the Spirit of God; they will feel, and they will be blessed in the feeling, that they are become the abode, "the temple of the Lord;" that their bosoms are God's dwelling-place, the "house of prayer."

And so likewise they that will have left us will have gone with more comfort and a better hope, and their trust in the promises of Christ will stand, with more truth, upon the Gospel of the Lord God.

SERMON II.

Second Sunday in Advent.

ISAIAH v. ii.

He looked that it should bring forth grapes, and it brought forth wild grapes.

THE first Lesson read to you this day in the Church Service opens with a parable, or, as the Prophet styles it, a song, touching the “vineyard of the Beloved.” The “Beloved” is the Lord Jesus Christ, who is called afterwards in the Gospels, by the voice of God, “My Beloved Son;” and this parable came by the Spirit to Isaiah from Jesus Christ. It is very much like the parable of the vineyard and the rebellious husbandmen, which you will read as delivered by our Lord in the twenty-first chapter of St. Matthew, and in the twelfth chapter of St. Mark. In this parable in Isaiah’s prophecy, and in both those chapters, by the vineyard is meant the Church of the Lord then established in Jerusalem. The words of the text are the complaint of the Lord against His Church, because it produced evil deeds instead of uprightness. “He looked that it should bring forth grapes, and it brought forth wild grapes.”

This complaint of the Lord is made the more heavy by looking back to see what had been done towards the cultivation and the defence of this vineyard; "He fenced it, and gathered out the stones thereof, and planted it with the choicest vine,"—and "what more could have been done to the vineyard that I have not done in it?" saith the Lord. This is the parable in the Lesson of the day; and after the parable comes the threatening of the Lord against this unfruitful plant,—“I will take away the hedge thereof, and it shall be eaten up, and break down the wall thereof, and it shall be trodden down, and I will lay it waste.” This threat was spoken because “the vine brought forth wild grapes,” and it has long ago been fulfilled.

Now what were the “wild grapes?” The “wild grapes” were the evil deeds which the Jews committed, and which were general amongst the people: “I looked for judgment, but behold oppression; for righteousness, but behold a cry.” The Lord looked for fruits, good fruits in His Church, but He found evil there; and therefore a sentence is pronounced against her. But how came this evil to spring up in the Church of the Lord? Was it that the Lord had not done enough for it? Was it that it was exposed to too many temptations? Not so, because the Lord had separated it from the evil nations round about; He had “fenced it;” He had planted “a hedge” about it; He had commanded that they should not mingle with the people on the outskirts,

but that they should keep themselves unmixed—a people holy to the Lord. Was it that they had no reason to put their faith and trust in the Lord? Not so, because the Lord had brought them into their “very fruitful hill”—into their promised land—by “a mighty hand” and by an “outstretched arm,” by signs and wonders, by continual miracles, so that they could not doubt that their Lord was the Almighty God; nor could they distrust His love for them. Was it that they had forgotten these things, that they had happened long ago, and that the memory of them therefore had slipped out of their minds? Not so, my brethren, because the Lord had ever from time to time raised up among them prophets, upright judges, righteous rulers, who continually turned their minds to the Lord, who continually laboured to keep up the worship of the true God, who reminded them without ceasing of the obedience, the faith, and trust in the Lord which their covenant required of them, who continually told them how small was their outset, how they arose only out of the obedience and faith of one man, and constantly bade them “look unto the rock whence they were hewn,—unto Abraham their father, and unto Sarah that bare them, for that the Lord called him alone, and blessed him, and increased him^a” for his faith’s sake, “which was counted to him for righteousness^b.”

The Church of God in Jerusalem brought forth her

^a Isa. li. 1, 2.

^b Gen. xv. 6.

evil deeds ; not that the Lord had not done His part towards her, neither that the Lord did not deserve their faith and trust ; not that they were ignorant of God and had forgotten Him, for none of these things were so ; but it was because they did not stay upon the Lord in thankfulness and faith, because they did not follow after Him in meekness and in prayer. Israel “ chose new gods ; there was war in the gates^c.” Every one who reads his Bible will see that they sought after the false gods and the idolatries of the people among whom they dwelt, and that out of this false worship arose their sins. They left the true God and joined themselves to the workers of wickedness, and accordingly they learnt to walk in their ways.

Now, my brethren, in all reading of the Bible the most useful way is to take that meaning home to ourselves which meets our minds at once and is the plainest to be seen. This is the most useful course for our souls, because whenever we happen to want either advice or correction from God’s Word, which is very often indeed, we may always in this manner find it without looking at all deep for it ; and thus if we take it at once and bring it home to ourselves, bowing down the head and saying, “ It is I,” we are made, by the grace of God, both more humble and more wise at the same time.

The first thing, then, in this matter which we have to ask, is this, If the Jews brought forth “wild

^c Judges v. 8.

grapes," what do we bear as our fruit? If we look abroad upon England, and notice the wickedness and the want of religion which there is to be met with, especially in our large towns, then we shall readily agree that the vine bringeth forth wild grapes; then we shall be compelled to hang down our heads and to confess that it is too true that sins do abound—shamefully abound everywhere; shamefully, when we consider "what great things God hath done for us;" when we consider with what gracious calls to godliness the Lord hath visited us; when we think on our light, our knowledge, our Church standing in the Lord Jesus, her pure forms, her pious services, the great outspread of God's Word, the outspread of teaching and learning; when we consider these things, "what more could the Lord have done for us that He hath not done?" wherefore doth the land "bring forth wild grapes?"

However, this is not the most useful manner in which we may bring the parable home to ourselves. The earnest Christian does not so much ask what the whole country does, as what is done close round about him. He hates sin, and he fears the Lord too much to look beyond his own circle, for therein he finds enough to contend against, and to pray for. He mourns indeed over a sinful land, he deeply fears for it, and earnestly prays for it, but his question rather is, What is there close at home? what sins are there among ourselves? are there wild grapes in our own parish? in our own temple? do wicked

weeds spring up among ourselves? If the Lord were now to call us to our judgment,—as we may be sure some of us He will call there before this day comes round again,—if we were now called to our account, should we meet the Lord with warm Christian hope, and should we trust for mercy for the sake of the Lord Christ our Sacrifice? This is the plain question which the parable brought to our recollection by the Church to-day enforces upon us: what answer do we make to it? To-day we enter on the second week in another Christian year: with what hopes? Is the coming year likely, from what has gone before, to lead us through purer paths than the year which has just ended? Can we look back on the last year, and say, Last year, no doubt, there was much ill language to be heard amongst us, there were irreverent swearers to be heard, the holy Name of the Lord God Almighty was not held in honour by many in our streets. Has this sin been amended? is it growing less? is there a greater reverence for God than there was? are we so far likely to walk more worthy of their calling than we have done heretofore? Last year there was much drinking and intemperance to be seen. Are these things growing less? There was impurity to be heard of, loose living, uncleanness. What does the Lord God now witness amongst us? If we all went to our judgment, would there be hope for us all when we thought of these things? There was dishonesty, there was wrangling and evil-speaking. Have all these things

been cast aside, and are we entering this new year with better hopes? This is the most useful way in which a Christian can look around him, when he is asked what sinfulness there is to be seen and to be corrected. He would enquire in the place where he dwelt, and with which he had to do,—he would ask how far God was honoured and obeyed by his neighbours around him, and he would pray for meekness and knowledge, so that he might more advance the Name of the Lord, and increase obedience among men. Now, my brethren, let us add to these thoughts another further consideration, viz. that if our sins are all the same as they were the last year, if there is the same profane talking, the same uncleanness amongst us and no more, the same dishonesty and no more, the same maliciousness, the same intemperance,—if all these things are the same, and no more than they used to be, nevertheless we are not the same. The sins may be the same, but we have committed them more and more; we have hardened our hearts in them more and more; therefore we are worse, and so we are in more danger.

The common saying, “If I am no better than I used to be, I am no worse,” is not true. It is one of Satan’s falsehoods, by which he leads a sinful soul to leave his sinfulness unsearched. If a man is no better, he is worse. St. Peter cautions us that we “*grow in grace*^d ;” but to grow is to increase, not to

^d 2 Peter iii. 18.

stand still, and if we do not amend we do not stand still, but we grow in sin and become worse. If a man had "the millstone tied about his neck" and was "cast into the sea," he would sink, and as long as the millstone was tied to him he would sink lower and lower, till he came to the uttermost depths thereof. So it is with sin; if the burden of sin is tied about the soul of any man, the soul sinks, and as long as sin remains the soul sinks lower and lower. The millstone is the same, the burden of sin may be the same, but if he leaves it unmoved where it is, if he makes no endeavour to rid himself, if he calls not on the Saviour to help him, if he prays not to the Holy Spirit to come and strengthen him, he will sink; and though the sin may only be the old sin, though it may not be more than it used to be,—which is unlikely,—though it be only the very same, still as long as the burden is there, and there allowed to abide, so long he will sink, and sink lower and lower, till he finds in his grave the uttermost depths of destruction. But a Christian heart not only looks around to see what sins there are which he can discourage, and which, by God's help, he may amend; it is with deep sorrow that a good mind discovers and ponders on the sinfulness of others, and it is with great doubting and with much gentleness that he judges them and condemns them. He is much more ready to look into himself; far rather he will say, I am now on the threshold of another year, how can I hope that I shall govern myself aright in it? what evil temper

have I mortified in the last year? no doubt many resolutions I made, how many have I fulfilled?

True it is that Christ often touched my heart; often I said, "Yea, Lord;" often I said, "Lo, I come,"—but did I come? I came for the time in spirit, I felt grace, I felt I was a sinner, and my heart was warmed with godly feeling; I determined to do my utmost to amend, I prayed to God to help me, and to guide me; true it is that last year I have had these feelings and resolutions; more than this, I have had my prayers answered; being not hitherto cast out of the covenant; still being, though but weakly, still being in baptismal grace; not yet a castaway; when I prayed for grace and aid,—grace, according to Christ's promise, promise of free mercy given unto me,—grace came and I was upheld in Christ, so when the temptation visited me again, then was I strongly warned, strongly admonished in spirit; my late prayers were remembered to me; my late promises, my repentances, my resolutions, my late prayers were all brought back to my mind; I was strongly called to come away, to leave my sin untouched, to follow after Christ and to be with Jesus,—then did I obey? Then did I answer the Spirit, "Yea, Lord?" did I then say, "Lo, I come?" was I obedient to the Spirit, the Comforter? was I found following the Lord in a meek and humble spirit, in the pure mind of a child of heaven? did I acknowledge my own prayers? did I make true my own pro-

mises, my own repentances? did I obey the grace which I besought the Lord to send me? or did I do despite unto the Holy Ghost, and thwart and “grieve” the Spirit of God? what does my last year bear witness against me? what old sins are left off? what new virtues have been begun, continued, and are being continued in Christ Jesus? what new course of more godly living, which, being upheld in prayer and willing obedience to Christ, I may hope will “be ended in the Lord?” These are the questions which a Christian likes to put to his own conscience when he hears such a parable read to him as this in the Prophet’s words to-day:—“Are there,” he says, “wild grapes in my vineyard? am I an unfruitful branch in the vine? am I one to be cut down and cast into the fire?” This is the question which the spirit held in the grace of God is quick to ask. This is the humble spirit that hates the spot, that dreads the sin, that is keen-sighted to find in his own garment any stain, that is true to answer, “Yea, Lord, it is I, God be merciful unto me a sinner!” This is the spirit also unto which the Lord will hearken,—the contrite spirit, the self-convicted spirit, the spirit feeling its own sins, owning them in truth, turning to God in prayer.

But, my brethren, if all this is common, if these repentances are not strange things, why is there so much sin? why are these vain and empty repentances so common? why does every preacher know that he may so frequently urge his hearers on these

points, and why does he also know that Christ's congregation will all so frequently acknowledge that they are, more or less, all drawn and pictured to the life in these parables of God's Word? why are all these unhappy truths so common, and the bringing forth of the "wild grapes" so abundant? I believe it is for no other reason than that we do as the Jews did. I believe, as the death is the same, so the disease is the same also. I believe it is because, as they would not stay in Christ's ordinances then, so neither do we now, and accordingly as they fell away then, so we also fall away in these days. I feel certain that the great cause of the abundance of sin among Christians is, because we will not stay, neither honestly attempt to stay in the covenant which we have made with Christ, in which we are bred, and in which we are called and have promised to come unto Him. My brethren, how very few are they who think in serious thankfulness on the baptismal vow which they have been elected to make! How very few think seriously of the renewal of that vow which they again made and undertook when they were confirmed! These are in themselves the most solemn things; they are engagements made with God; they are promises made on our part with Almighty God Himself that we will obey every gracious movement which He sends into our hearts; and that, willingly and faithfully, we will endeavour, in the strength of these holy movements, to walk in His ways, and to be His servants.

Now what takes place? Satan lays some temptation in our way; grace is sent to us in the shape of warnings and recollections of our duty, and sufficient grace is sent to enable us to defeat the tempter, but too often we throw the weight into Satan's scale,—we accept the temptation, and we defeat grace. We make a covenant with the Lord to do our utmost endeavour to live after His laws; Christ, in His free mercy and love to us, accepts this covenant, and promises to give us strength here to serve Him, and then hereafter to plead His Sacrifice of Himself, when the Judgment cometh for us whom He hath made, so that these poor services of ours may be held worthy, for His sake, of eternal salvation; a temptation comes, straightway we break our part of the covenant, and then we flatter ourselves that we have done no great harm, but that we are God's people much as we were before, and that we may build on our covenant as securely as ever.

While religion has this poor hold on us, and temptation has so strong a power, can good fruits be very abundant? Can we expect grace to be continually given, if it is to be so wilfully thwarted and cast away? Can we expect that Christ will look upon a broken covenant as if it was unbroken? Can we think that, because we shut our eyes to the true state of the case, that the Eyes of the Lord will be closed also? Must there not be "wild grapes" in such a vineyard as this? And, answer for yourselves, my brethren, are there not wild grapes?

But then, you may be told, "O, never despair about your sins, only believe in Christ, and all will be well!" Believe, my brethren! Yes, but then let me pray you to believe in all the things that the Lord Christ says, as well as in some of them. The Lord Christ promises His Salvation, on account of His Blood, to all those who obey Him, He promises condemnation to all those who disobey Him. If you believe in Christ, then believe these things! The Lord Christ promises that they shall be His flock who follow Him, He also promises that they shall be lost in the wilderness who stray from Him; now believe these things, one as well as the other. The Lord Christ promises that they shall be His servants who serve Him, that they shall not be of His household who disobey and oppose Him; now, my brethren, be wise then, believe all that the Lord says, not some part only.

Why were the Ten Commandments written with the finger of God? Were they written to be obeyed, or to be disobeyed? were they not written to keep down sin, and to maintain good living? Why did the Lord Jesus come to confirm these laws? Was it not to keep down sin? Did Christ sacrifice Himself on the Cross in order that sin might the easier enter into heaven? Why does St. Paul everywhere warn "the elect," "the chosen," "the called," "the saints," to cast off all kinds of sins, both of the mind and also of the flesh, but because he well knew that they were all liable to break through their covenant

and call, and to wallow in filthiness? Why does St. John make it the great proof of a Christian spirit, and the leading duty of one called in Jesus, that he keep the commandments^e of the Lord Jesus Christ?

Why are these things thus, and the whole burden of the Word thus laid upon us, but that sin may be kept down by those in covenant with Christ? This is the great labour of love, to subdue the flesh for the love of Christ; and the teacher whose teaching can turn you, in fond confidence, to labour any where but in your own heart, may not mean it very likely, but he gives you false directions, false hopes, false lights, and puts you in a way wherein, it may be, you will never see God.

Now from this carelessness in Church teaching, this undervaluing of your covenant with Christ, comes at once a false religion, and unchastened souls, unchristian minds, and presumptuous claims on Christ, most fearfully joined together. These things are to be seen in our own vineyard, and they are "wild grapes."

My brethren, let us determine better things. Let us begin this Christian year by remembering that "the Scriptures were written for our learning^f;" let us remember that the Word is, "all Holy Scriptures^g," not 'some Holy Scriptures;' let us then "hear them, read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest them," with this recollection; let us say, "The Lord

^e 1 John ii. 3, 4.

^f Rom. xv. 4.

^g 2 Tim. iii. 16.

Christ hath sent us nothing that we may cast it behind us!" Let our Word be the whole Word, the whole Word of God; let no man keep back any. Not some, but all; not a part only, and that the part which searches our hearts least, and that part, moreover, misinterpreted; let not our hope stand on such weakness, but on all God's Word; so that we may ever receive Christ as He hath revealed Himself in all meekness, in all self-correction, in all thankfulness; and thus humbly begging for His aid, and following thereafter, may stay in Christ's fold, willing labourers therein.

SERMON III.

Third Sunday in Advent.

1 CORINTHIANS iv. 2.

It is required in stewards that a man be found faithful.

THE Collect for the first Sunday in Advent is chosen by the Church with the intention to turn our minds to the approaching season in which she commemorates the appearance of our Lord Christ in the flesh, and it leads us to pray that our preparation here may enable us, through the Sacrifice on the Cross, to meet our Redeemer with hope, when He shall “come again in His glorious Majesty to judge both the quick and the dead.” The second Collect in Advent is a beautiful prayer, that we may make perfect that preparation by the diligent and constant study of the Holy Scriptures, and that we may derive from them that “blessed hope of everlasting life which has been given us in our Saviour Jesus Christ.” The Epistles and Gospels appointed to be read after these Collects reiterate and refresh the same feelings and prayers. On the third Sunday in Advent the Church prays that this reading may be so directed and quickened by the priesthood, that

they may, by God's grace, be enabled "to turn the hearts of the disobedient to the wisdom of the just," that "at His second coming, to judge the world, we may be found an acceptable people" in the sight of the Lord. As in the services for the two Sundays which have gone before, so also in the service for this Sunday, the Epistle and Gospel point to the same holy thoughts which are contained in the Collect:—"Let a man so account of us as of the ministers of Christ, and stewards of the mysteries of God. Moreover, it is required in stewards that a man be found faithful."

The chief thing here stated in the character of a steward is that he "be found faithful." It is therefore a chief thing in the character of the priesthood, "the stewards of the mysteries of God," that they be found faithful. This, my brethren, includes much. In the first place, they must be faithful towards the Lord their Master. They must be faithful in gaining a full knowledge of His Word, a possession of it: it is, in an especial manner, their duty to know their Bible, to have the doctrines contained in God's Word fully impressed upon their minds; to be able, from the Scriptures, to maintain the truth, to put to silence gainsayers, and to admonish and convince error and unbelief. Without this preparation they cannot rightly fulfil their duty, and, in consequence, may easily fail, as not being faithful stewards. Next it is their duty to shew to their flocks, by the uprightness, the purity, and the kindness of their lives,

that they are convinced of the truth of the Word which they teach. Therefore, as St. Paul cautions them, they must “be blameless^a.”

This is indeed an awful demand upon the priesthood of the Lord Jesus Christ, and there is no doubt but, in this point, they must pray for mercy, and must deprecate justice. Blameless in the sight of God they can never be, in whose sight the very angels stand chargeable “with folly^b!” When we consider the perfect purity of the Gospel law,—when we remember the absolute singleness, the cleanness of mind from this world in all points, which the Gospel enjoins upon Christians,—when we look to that universal charity and love to all men which it demands,—when we regard the utter carelessness for wealth, pomps, and precedencies, which it inculcates, in order that the Lord may receive the sole honour, and the most entire obedience which man can shew unto Him,—and then, when we further recollect that in this struggle against “the flesh” and “the world,” against our frail and evil appetites, the ministers of the Lord are, above all others, bound to be “blameless,” and to be “ensamples of the believers^c,” then may they well tremble, and declare that, in the sight of God, “blameless they can never be!” When they stand before His judgment-seat they also, like unto all other men, shall have to crave, through Christ, pardon for “things done,” and pardon for “things

^a Titus i. 7.

^b Job iv. 18.

^c 1 Tim. iv. 12.

left undone." They shall have to confess that in self-denial they have been incomplete, they shall call to mind that anger has hurried them away, that the world has tempted them; they shall remember with shame that obedience has been unsteadfast, that constancy has staggered, that levity has sometimes placed strict duty out of sight, that the Lord has been less upheld by them than has been demanded by their position, less upheld than their abilities gave them power. Be your priesthood as pure, as learned, as holy as it may, still, inasmuch as it is human, in the sight of God, who is purity itself, who is perfect holiness, who is perfect wisdom, who is perfect loving-kindness, in the sight of God it always must appear weak, erring, and wanting pardon.

In this strict view of the command of St. Paul, their duties will always appear insufficiently fulfilled, and they themselves needing forgiveness, and they will stand, in common with all mankind, in need of a Redeemer, and hopeful only through His Blood. In the sight of man, however, they will, if they "be faithful," so comport themselves as to prove that they do feel the truth of the Gospel which they preach; and if as regards themselves they have awful duties to fulfil, so as regards their people, they are to be unto them at once guides to holy living and examples of it. This is necessarily the most important part of the office of the priest in his relation towards the Church of the Lord Jesus.

upon earth. It is his special call to spread abroad the Word of God, not only in his place in the temple, but weekly and daily in his intercourse with all people. In his private conversations, whether with the sick or with the healthy, his talk should always have some good thing in it, and be seasoned, if it may be, from the Gospels; it should always turn the mind of man towards what is right, it should uphold whatever is true, it should maintain justice, it should praise mercy, it should rebuke folly, it should condemn vice, it should instruct ignorance in every case, it should strive to do good, and this constantly, in a plain manner, and in a kind and willing temper.

But this is not the whole, by any means, of the priest's duty towards the Church of the Lord. In dispensing the Word he is bound to be bold and uncompromising in holding up to sight the terrors of the Lord, whenever he sees any sin in open practice. This is especially his duty when standing in the temple. Then he is openly, without fear and without favour, to proclaim the judgments of God against all or any sin. This is a highly valuable part of his duty, and must not be shortened. If sin was to go on without rebuke, if there was no one to condemn it with authority, no one sent from the Lord to threaten it with the punishments of God, how would iniquity flourish and grow strong in the land! As it is, crime is too abundant amongst us,—shamefully abundant, when we consider that we

call ourselves Christians! As it is, there is to be found amongst us every kind of wrong and evil. No one doubts but all that is unchristian is to be discovered in communities which are called Christian, and that the instances of sin are very frequent. Licentiousness, hard-heartedness, falsehood, riot, malice, intemperance, "evil fruit" from "evil trees," though they deeply grieve all thoughtful men, do not surprise any. But how would all this increase if there was no one to rebuke it! If no one chastised it, and threatened it in the name of the Lord, how would these "tares" and evil weeds increase upon the harvest! If every man was allowed to follow his own way unreprieved, his habit would be to indulge his own sin, and to comfort his conscience by condemning his neighbours; each man would grow worse in his own way, and all men would find their passage to Satan according to their own appetites. The greedy man would cry out, "I am chaste," and the loose liver would say, "but I am not covetous;" the drunkard would exclaim, "I am not malicious," and the malicious man would say, "I am sober." Satan would suit his bait to the taste and temper of every victim, and mankind would fall, in great part, into that condemnation and loss of souls which our Lord and Redeemer died to prevent. This, no doubt, is one of the reasons which moved the mercy of God to appoint a priesthood to which you may look, whose office it is, in the temple and in the field, in the house and in the way, publicly and

privately, to rebuke vice, to condemn all evil of whatsoever kind. This also, no doubt, is among the reasons why this priesthood was not left to be filled up and chosen by man, who could not have given them authority, neither could he have promised them a blessing. This we may believe it was which led the Lord Christ to appoint His Church Himself; this it was which moved Him to choose and select His first ministers, the apostles, and which led Him to grant them power to appoint and ordain their successors, who should come after them, “even unto the end of the world^d ;” so that, still as time runs on, so also the succession extends itself, priest following priest, and bishop rising up after bishop, each drawing his authority from the Fountain-head, Christ the Lord, and each standing on His word and under His blessing. These, then, are “the stewards of the mysteries of God,” and in their keeping has the Lord placed His word, and on them has He laid the duty of enforcing it; into their hands has He placed His sacraments, and to them has He promised His blessing upon their services.

We see now how valuable, indeed how necessary, is such an appointed ministry, in order to bring salvation effectually among men; indeed, we may well suppose that had it not been necessary, the appointment and ordination of Christian ministers

^d Matt. xxviii. 20.

would not have been made. We see also how necessary it is that they “be found faithful,” that they do openly, fully, and without fear, exhort the weak-hearted, rebuke the headstrong, chastise the wicked, in the Name and from the word of the Lord God Almighty, our Maker, our Redeemer, and our Sanctifier. This necessity St. Paul felt, when he said that necessity was laid upon him; “Yea, woe is unto me,” he said, “if I preach not the Gospel!” But then, my brethren, all holy duties are difficult to the flesh; therefore it is that your priesthood seek your prayers on their behalf; and as they daily beseech God for you, so they ask that you will, in turn, beg God’s grace on them, in order that they may, more and more strengthened in the Spirit, safely lead you on unto all “godliness of living.”

I have thus far endeavoured, in some part, to shew what is the use and duty of your priesthood, established and ordained in Jesus Christ, and to state, in a short and plain manner, how they were set up by God, and so to let you see what is their call on you, and by what authority. But in the end of this sermon I wish to shew you also that they are not the only stewards in the sight of the Lord Jesus Christ, and that there is one sense in which all of you, more or less, may be considered to be stewards under God.

In the first place, every man ought to remember

that he is bound to answer to God for his own soul. It is an inestimable talent committed to his keeping, inestimable, because it is everlasting. Accordingly, everlastingly it ought to be employed, here on earth and for ever in heaven; if such is the mercy of God, in advancing the good of man and the glory of the Lord God. This, we must believe, is the reason why every soul was created; and therefore when this course is neglected or contravened through sin, then that person is an "unfaithful steward" in the first degree.

There are, however, other duties less clear than this, and duties also in which personally we do not seem to be all so closely interested; I will therefore go on to notice them, because they cannot be neglected without much sin. Parents, then, are stewards in the sight of God, and must hold themselves as answerable to God for the souls of those little ones who have been sent unto them. They are bound to be faithful ministers to those who look up to them; faithful ministers of prayer and the word of God to them; faithful in correcting the faults of their children; faithful in finding out and controlling their early inclinations to wrong; faithful in leading them, in compelling them, if needs be, into good and holy courses; faithful, in short, in making them remember that they have vowed to cast down "the world, the flesh, and the devil" before the cross of Christ, and that their covenant with God is not "to worship" these things, but to "renounce them." My

brethren, if every parent would so act by his children, how often his own forgotten baptismal vow would be brought to his own mind, and would smite upon his own heart! how often he would chastise himself sorely in his conscience, while he was admonishing them! and while he was keeping them pure, how often would he at the same time purify himself! When a parent places these duties in other hands, and gives up altogether this most holy care to others, he often gives away his own purification. I would press upon you that you are not faithful stewards in this respect, unless, so far as you can, you live with your children; unless it is your daily care that whatever evil temper a child displays, it is met with a temperate but an immediate discountenance, and, if necessary, with correction; and this on the Gospel ground, because it is evil, because it offends God, because it grieves the Lord Jesus Christ. Their evil tempers, their angers, their little violences should be repressed, not because they are troublesome to yourselves, but because they are proofs that Satan is at work, and because he is "sowing tares," bad dispositions, which, if suffered to grow, will increase till the child is no longer "a child of grace," no longer "a child of God." From the very first beginning a child should know that a wrong word or a violent action is hateful to God; from the first beginning he should be chidden and corrected for it; and when the evening comes, and his little knees are bent upon his mother's lap to

lisp out his innocent prayer to the Father of innocents, then he should ask God to forgive him his little anger, his bad word, or his spiteful temper; and this done, let him receive from his parent—then God's minister to him—the kiss of peace and reconciliation. If such practices were in every house, I am sure that sin would be very much hindered and checked in the world; I feel certain that every child, when entering life, would have more Christian principle in the heart, more grace to oppose to sin, more prayer and more resolution to set against temptation; I feel certain that there would be fewer downfalls, fewer miserable lives amongst us, than there are at present. We may see young men who are loose-living, who are intemperate, who are dishonest,—have they been painfully trained up in Gospel self-command at home? We may see young women vain, profligate, and often abandoned in disposition; were they brought up in the constant fear of God, and taught to look to their Redeemer? Have they been taught to bring their hearts before God every night in prayer? have they been taught to value a clean breast? have their parents been faithful stewards? I should not be “faithful” as a minister, unless I called upon you to think of these things.

If parents, under God, are stewards, so also are masters of households, and even servants. It is the duty of every master and head of house to advance, as far as he can, the religious practice of every one

under his roof. "As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord^f," should be his determination. On the Sabbath, in particular, work should be so ordered that some part of the establishment should always be able and always expected to follow the family to church. This used to be the case formerly in all families, and it is still the practice of the gentry, and all better regulated householders; a great increase of good would arise amongst us if this good old custom was fully brought into play again. It is very usual to see in church a decent, regular, and attentive assemblage of the heads of all the respectable houses round about the temple, but it is not so common to see the regular attendance of their servants. Now, in a great degree this might be brought about. It would make good servants better servants; it would make bad servants begin to grow good. What they heard in God's house would insensibly do them good,—by degrees they would feel that religion had a truth and a reality about it. But, on the other hand, if they see their masters going to worship, but leaving them to do as they like, what can they think but that worship is not a matter of much consequence. Moreover, while they are left at home, and the master's eye is withdrawn, there is a great check taken from them, and they are left at liberty to plot, or to execute anything which is hurtful either to their master's interests or

^f Joshua xxiv. 15

to their own souls. But, by example, and by the habit of the house, let them be regularly brought in turn to the house of God, and they will, in every respect, grow better. God's word will have power over them, and hearing regularly what is good, they would still be learning better and better things, they would become more regular, more honest, more trustworthy; and the more they are trained in the service of God, the more true and upright they will be in the service of man.

Lastly, if masters are stewards and ministers of God, so also are servants stewards, and the Lord's command to them also is, that they be found "faithful." It is one of the marks of the holy origin of the Gospel that it takes in every one under its commands, as it also admits every one to salvation in Jesus Christ the Lord. Servants are stewards, inasmuch as there is much entrusted to them. In their labour, by their industry they may advance their master's interests, by their sloth they may greatly injure them. So also in whatever is placed in their hands, by their carefulness they may protect their master, by their wastefulness they may diminish his substance unfairly, by their pilfering they may rob him. A servant taught by the Gospel will feel this, and will obey Christ his Master. He will know that it has pleased God to place him in the world as a servant, and it is his duty to act as a good man in that station. He will know that in such a course his salvation is advanced, that by any other habits

Jesus Christ is wounded. He will remember that he has his hire on the understanding that he is found "faithful," and he will also know that to take his wages while he has been faithless, idle, or dissolute, is to be false, and is hateful in the eyes of that God whose mercy hereafter he will have to pray for, when he comes to stand before the judgment-seat. The truth is, my brethren, though the text looks especially to the priesthood in the first place, and therefore I have first so considered it, nevertheless we are all, whether priests or laymen, in many ways stewards one to another. It is therefore, as a matter of course, necessary and most beneficial that every one in his station "be found faithful" and true.

This particular period of the year is a fit time to ask, before the question overtakes us in judgment, how we have hitherto regarded and fulfilled our several duties one to the other. If we should find that we have overlooked any part of our duties, let us, in a repentant spirit, put up an honest and earnest prayer to Christ, that, in these points especially, we may live more under the guidance of God's grace in all time to come. Let us hope, and by Christ's aid let us endeavour, that these periods may not slip away without notice and improvement. Let them, my brethren, awaken thought! Let us listen to them, and lay up the words in our hearts, as they seem, in a manner, to speak to us and say, "As we go by, we leave

you for ever! You can never see us again! If you have not been improved while we were with you, now you can never be improved by us! If we have been mispent by you, then so far you have injured your souls for ever! If you will be saved, 'redeem the time^s;' and for the remainder of your days live in prayer, in the fear of God, in doing good among men, and in upholding the Name and glory of God!"

^s Ephes. v. 16.

SERMON IV.

Fourth Sunday in Advent.

PHILIPPIANS iv. 4, 5.

Rejoice in the Lord alway: and again I say, Rejoice. Let your moderation be known unto all men. The Lord is at hand.

THE Epistle which the Church orders us to read to-day is full of comfort, and is also rich in wise advice. The Church exhorts us, in these words of St. Paul, to look steadfastly on the hopes and privileges which the Gospel bestows on the Christian, and thereon to build up a bold trust in eternal peace through the Lord Jesus, and in this assured expectation to find a consolation in all the trials of this world. In bringing under your notice, in an especial manner, this portion of St. Paul's Epistle, the Church reminds us that our duty is to live in quietness and patience; to be satisfied and contented in whatever station the Lord has placed us; she warns us not to be too anxious about the affairs of this life, but to abide in prayer unto the Lord, and to put our trust in God for protection and support; she commands us to maintain grateful hearts, by calling to mind the mercies wherewith God has blessed us; and she gives, as a reason for this course of life, the

warning that we shall be tried but for a little time ; that our days are short, that “the Lord is at hand,” who, as a righteous Judge, will soon appear to give an eternal reward to all who, in faith and humble endeavour, have striven to fulfil their duty to God and man. In this course, the Church, leaning on the promises of her Lord and Founder Jesus Christ, feels assured that each of her children may pass through the world with a peaceful conscience and in a tranquil spirit, in a happy and a hopeful mind, founded on a knowledge of what Christ hath done and suffered for the sake of man ; may meet death in that peaceful hope of mercy, which is the earnest of forgiveness of all sin to them who serve God unto the end in faith and fear. In the following sermon I wish to make a few remarks on some of the particulars touched on in this Epistle.

“Rejoice in the Lord alway, and again I say, Rejoice.” At first sight it would seem that few people had less reason for rejoicing than the first Christians, to whom these words were sent. They were, in their worldly condition, like many of you, my brethren, badly off in the world ; they were poor, destitute, and friendless ; many of them were worse off than any of us are in this land : they were slaves, they were the property of their masters, they were bought and sold in the market at a price like “the beast that perisheth ;” but more than this, they were exposed to an evil far worse even than this, they suffered the most dreadful persecutions on account

of their religion. The whole world were at that time idolaters; and when they heard their idols said to be mere stocks and stones, they were enraged at the insolence of these despised Christians, and looking on this new religion as blasphemy against their old gods, they persecuted the Christians with the utmost fury. This rage against them was increased also because the Christians called for a change of life as well as a change of belief; they taught that many evil practices common among men must be abandoned, that many vices must be given up for ever, that, in numerous ways, mankind must live both more in kindness one towards another, and also in more purity of life; and unless their teaching was obeyed, they threatened every one, of all degrees, the emperor on the throne and the slave in the field, "high and low, rich and poor, one with the other^a," with everlasting punishment in another world after death. Astonished and enraged at this teaching, the whole world joined in persecuting the Christians, so that they had to endure cruelties which are now unheard of. St. Paul plainly writes to the Hebrews as to men who, like the saints of the Old Testament of whom he was reminding them, "had trial of cruel mockings, and scourgings; yea, moreover, of bonds and imprisonments; they were stoned; were sawn asunder; were tempted; were slain with the sword; they wandered about in sheep-skins and

^a Ps. xlix. 2.

goat-skins, in deserts and mountains, in dens and caves of the earth^b.” And yet under all these trials, under persecutions and deaths, so likely to produce sorrow and despair, St. Paul writes to the Church of the Philippians, “Rejoice in the Lord alway;” under whatsoever distresses, “alway rejoice in God;” and he adds, “Again I say, rejoice!” Why was this, my brethren? No doubt because when he wrote these words St. Paul looked forward. He did not look on this world as he then saw it; he looked beyond it, and he saw “Jesus standing at the right hand of God!” He knew that many of those who would read that Epistle would suffer the keenest trials; that many would have to pass through this vale of tears in the deepest tribulations, that grief would be their portion in this wilderness on earth; but he would have them “use it as a well^c” in their pilgrimage, a refreshment to help them on in their toilsome course; therefore he bade them turn away their eyes from trials, which must fill them with pain both of body and mind, and to “look unto the end.” He bid them to rejoice in what was beyond the grave; he taught them to rejoice in the trust of that everlasting peace which is given, for Christ’s sake, to them who pass their time in quiet and contented piety, and fall asleep in the Lord Jesus; to rejoice in the hope that when the changes and chances of this mortal life are ended, when their labours were over,

^b Heb. xi. 36—38.

^c Ps. lxxxiv. 6.

and their painful journey finished, that then they should enjoy the everlasting reward of their faith and uprightness, then “they should hunger no more, neither thirst any more, neither should the sun light on them, nor any heat; for that the Lamb which is in the midst of the throne should lead them unto living fountains of water, and that God should wipe away all tears from their eyes^d.” It was this foresight of the blessedness that will be the portion of Christ’s flock hereafter, which led St. Paul to direct the Philippians to “rejoice in the Lord alway.”

But because their time here is so short, he added, “Let your moderation be known unto all men.” Do not be covetous of what you cannot keep. Desire of wealth must lead to many sins, but the wealth itself you must soon leave, even if you get it. One of the great duties of a Christian life is to behave in the station in which it has pleased God to place us, in a peaceable and contented manner. God is “the author of peace,” the “lover of concord;” God is the source of order and rule, and therefore all violence of temper, harshness of language, unruliness of behaviour, is necessarily unpleasing in His sight. He has from the beginning ordained that there should be various ranks and degrees amongst men, some to govern, others to obey, some to teach, others to learn, and it is His express command that all should behave seemly, soberly,

^d Rev. vii. 16, 17.

and orderly in their own stations, fulfilling the duties of them “as to the Lord, and not to men^e ;” that is, conscientiously and religiously ; rendering to those among whom we live kindness, respect, or reverence, according to the station in which God has placed them in the world. “Render,” says the Apostle, “to all their dues ; tribute to whom tribute is due ; custom to whom custom ; fear to whom fear ; honour to whom honour^f !” In the same spirit the Apostles lay down their rules, in accordance with the example and teaching of the Lord, when they appoint us the mode in which we are to let our moderation be known unto all men with respect to the governing powers. “Honour,” writes St. Peter,—“honour the king ; be subject unto the higher powers^g.” “Not only for wrath, but for conscience’ sake,” saith St. Paul^h. “Submit yourselves,” saith St. Peter, “to every ordinance of man for the Lord’s sake, whether it be to the king, as supreme, or unto governors, as unto those that are sent by Him for the punishment of evil doers, and for the praise of them that do wellⁱ.”

With regard to the behaviour which is due to the ministers in the Church of Jesus the Lord, the Word of God thus speaks,—“Know them who labour among you, and are over you in the Lord, and admonish you ; and esteem them very highly in love for their

^e Eph. vi. 7. ^f Rom. xiii. 7. ^g 1 Pet. ii. 17.

^h Rom. xiii. 5.

ⁱ 1 Pet. ii. 13, 14.

work's sake^j." "Obey them that have the rule over you, and submit yourselves, for they watch for your souls, as they that must give account; that they may do it with joy, and not with grief^k."

So also with regard to the behaviour that is due from those in humbler life to such as are above them in the world, the same Scriptures deliver also the like commands, and in the same manner teach moderation in all things from servants to their masters, from labourers to those who employ them. "Servants, be subject to your masters, with all fear; not with eye-service, as men pleasers, but as the servants of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart; not answering again, not purloining, but shewing all good fidelity, that they may adorn the doctrine of God our Saviour in all things^l." Such, my brethren, is the conduct by which you are to "let your moderation be known unto all men." Rules they are which the worldly man will set his heart against at once; but this is not wonderful, for "the friendship of the world is enmity with God^m;" rules which perhaps some of you, my brethren, have scoffed at in your minds as you heard the words of the Apostle, for there is no doubt but they would keep you from many courses which you see common among men, and which appear likely to help you forward in life. Many will say, "Be sharp in looking after your own interest,

^j 1 Thess. v. 12, 13.

^k Heb. xiii. 17.

^l Eph. vi.; Col. iii.; Titus ii. 9, 10.

^m James iv. 4.

let your master's come in the second place ; as to those in authority, obey them as far as you must, but there is small sin in neglecting to fulfil a law, small sin in breaking it, and in these matters look to yourself." Many again will say, as regards your minister, "Do not let him persuade you to lose the pleasures and enjoyments of the world ; if you do sin, there is room to repent, and the Lord our God is merciful." These are maxims and feelings which Satan and the world, whom you have renounced, will teach, and there are many who obey them, and who counsel others to throw in their lot with them.

But these are all men of excess ; these are not men of moderation, they are not men of God. My brethren, our duty before Jesus the Lord is to do, as did the Lord Jesus, towards every man the best we can ; whether he is a ruler, or God's priest, or a master, or a fellow companion, to do him whatever good we can, and that fully and entirely. This will seem to keep you back, perhaps, in the world ; you may have to deny yourself, give up, perhaps, opportunity of advancement ; but you are sent into the world, not to get forward in the world, but to go on towards heaven ; and the way there is to do good, and all the good you can.

We are to a shameful degree a money-loving people, and this may seem poor teaching, but it is the truth, and it has a broad mark of the truth upon it ; for, even if it should not give you this world's wealth, still it would lay up a treasure for you elsewhere,

it would make you rich in the sight of God, and you should be laying up in store against the judgment-day, when the hand of man will seem empty of an offering, and when the best deeds which we can lay before the throne will seem beggarly gifts to bring before the Lord.

This also is the reason which St. Paul gives why we should be moderate in all things,—“The Lord,” says he, “is at hand.” These words contain a double warning: they tell us that the Lord sees all our actions; if we are shifting and dishonest, the Lord sees it; if we are unruly, headstrong, and disobedient, the Lord sees it, “He is at hand,” He notes it down, it is a treasure of evil laid up for the judgment-day, it is not to go unrequited. “God is not mockedⁿ,” but for all these things there is a reckoning.

So, also, death is at hand, the Lord’s judgment is near unto every one of us. This is the second meaning of the Apostle in these words,—the day which is to bring us before God is at hand. Death, which removes every man for ever from all the concerns of this world, is very near; every one must soon fall before his stroke. We know not how soon it may be before He calls us away, therefore it is of small consequence what our disappointments, our inconveniences, or our difficulties may be while we abide on earth, seeing that our continuance “hath

ⁿ Gal. vi. 7.

no stay ;” and that, at the very best, we cannot be here long. For this cause also we should be earnest, and should make haste to do good, because “the night cometh when no man can work^o,” and then we shall be rewarded according to our deeds ; “they that have done good shall go into life everlasting ; they that have done evil into everlasting fire.”

With this view before his eyes, the Apostle exhorts us “to be careful for nothing.” Here St. Paul does not mean that we should be heedless in the affairs of life, that we should cast off prudence and care in providing for our households ; on the contrary, the Saint would urge, in this matter, that we be diligent to do good not only to all men, but especially to our own households, for he that neglects “those of his own house” is, as he writes in another place, “worse than an unbeliever^p.” In short, a proper care of the welfare of all whom the Lord has placed under our guardianship is not only conformable with our Christian duties, but is far more, inasmuch as it forms a part, and a great part, of our duty. But by being “careful of nothing” St. Paul means that we should not forget God and His service in the business of this world ; that we should not suffer the “things eternal” to be put out of our minds by the “things temporal.” He means that in our lawful pursuits we should be moderate and temperate, that we should not follow up our

^o St. John ix. 4.

^p 1 Tim. v. 8.

worldly interests too keenly, we should not be close and covetous, not be so earnest about them as to forget God and His laws in the pursuit; that we should not be so anxious to keep advantages, as to overlook what is right; that we should not be fretful if we do not obtain them, nor murmur if the Lord takes them away.

He has given us a very plain and a very beautiful description of his own moderation, his own carelessness about all worldly things, and this also in the same chapter which we have now placed before us by the Church of God. "I have learned," he says, "in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content. I know both how to be abased, and I know how to abound: everywhere and in all things I am instructed both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need⁹." Instead of this over-carefulness and anxiety, which often makes us miserable, and which we must believe to be displeasing to the Lord, inasmuch as it seems to doubt the good providence of God, the Apostle teaches us to "make known our requests to God in prayer and supplication;" to draw near unto Him who in His loving-kindness prepares, and in His wisdom foresees, what is best for us; who mercifully bestows upon us whatever is best for us to have, and who accepts every prayer which is offered up in sincerity and faith. "Humble yourselves," says St. Peter, "under

⁹ Phil. iv. 11, 12.

the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you in due time: casting all your care upon Him; for He careth for you^r." God knows our wants, and is able and ready to supply them; He sees our infirmities, and is willing to assist them; He marks our troubles, and in pity is inclined to relieve them; but He expects that we should turn to Him for assistance by frequent prayer, with a heart smitten with a sense of our own inability to help ourselves; with a deep conviction of our own unworthiness of His mercies, and of our frequent thanklessness for His goodness; He expects that we constantly offer up to Him the sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving for the innumerable instances of mercy which we have already received and are constantly receiving from His hands.

My brethren, whenever we feel it necessary to beg for special favours from men like unto ourselves, we then approach and ask for them with submissiveness and earnestness, and when we have received any great and undeserved benefits from them, we equally think it right to shew our gratitude to them by the warmest expressions of thankfulness. If, then, such be the case in human affairs, how much more should we feel it to be our bounden duty to shew submission, reverence, urgency in prayer, and warmth in thanksgiving, in our spiritual and heavenly concerns? To pray humbly and earnestly,

^r 1 Pet. v. 6, 7.

frequently and devoutly, to that Almighty God in whom we live and move, to whom we owe all that we are and all that we have, on whom we depend for safety and preservation, both until we die and after we have passed through the grave, this certainly is at once our highest duty and our greatest wisdom. There is no true Christian who does not every morning and every night draw near to God in prayer, who does not beg for protection from evil through the day, for grace to guide him into godliness; who does not beseech the Lord to preserve himself and all around him from all harm and all sin; who does not nightly pray for defence through the darkness, for pardon for the sins of the day, for the continuance of those blessings without which he must perish both here and in the world to come. So also daily will he offer up thanksgiving and praise for the numberless mercies which the Lord has poured down upon him; for the defence which God has extended to him and his family against the dangers of his waking hours, and the perils of darkness; above all, for His inestimable love in the redemption of mankind by our Lord Jesus Christ, for the means of grace, and for the hope of glory, blessings which He has prepared in His mercy to a fallen and sinful world.

These thoughts, my brethren, which may be drawn from the Epistle read by the Church to-day, have been held to be fitting considerations for that Sabbath which falls immediately before Christmas-day,

the commemoration of the Coming of the Lord in the flesh ; they have been held to be thoughts which well befit us now that we are drawing close to the end of another year. My brethren, let us not cast them away. Every man must have his time when he will think of himself seriously and deeply, or he will be lost. This the Church feels, and therefore at this season she reads St. Paul's words, which exhort you to leave the world behind you, and to shape your hearts under God in Christian courses ; to love earthly things less, and to desire godliness more, because the " Lord is at hand."

SERMON V.

Christmas-day.

ST. LUKE ii. 14.

*Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will
toward men.*

THESE words, which are read in the second Lesson of the Morning Service on this day, were sung by the angels of God who appeared in the heavens when our Lord Jesus Christ was born. They are words such as we should expect the angels of God would utter; they are words full of devotion to God, full of loving-kindness towards men.

The first sentence in this hymn is partly, no doubt, a thanksgiving to the Lord because He had seen fit to send His only-begotten Son to be the Redeemer and the Saviour of the world. The heavenly host foresaw that the coming of the Lord Christ would bring many souls into bliss, and they poured forth their thanksgiving for this mercy; they felt their own happiness enlarged by the happiness of redeemed man, and they blessed God for this fresh spreading forth of His loving-kindness in the words, "Glory to God in the highest." So also,

no doubt, they foresaw the enlargement which the glory of God might, in one sense, receive by the larger number of those who would now enter into bliss through the Lord Jesus Christ; and in this view their words are a foretelling and a proclamation of this advance of glory in the kingdom of God beyond the grave.

The second part of this sacred song well accords also with what we should expect the angels to feel and sing, "On earth peace, good will toward men^a." The angels long had dwelt in the presence of the Lord God Almighty; they had for a long time "seen Him as He is;" they had seen the mercy, the love, the goodness of God, and therefore they foresaw that His coming among men on earth would produce here also an enlargement of all holy feelings and habits, they felt that His teaching would tend towards peace, and would be a source of "good will among men."

The first words in the passage before us require but little remark, "Glory to God in the highest" is a sentence of which it is not difficult to discover the meaning: it is a pious prayer that glory may be where all glory is due. We may believe that this prayer arose, in part at least, out of gratitude to God because the redemption of the world, so long promised and foreshadowed, had at length begun. These words, doubtless, contained a prayer that this

^a St. John iii. 2.

redemption might redound to the still wider glory of God, that by the Sacrifice of the Lord Christ, now entering the world in the flesh, multitudes might be brought to sing in their words, "Glory to God," multitudes might be led to follow in the footsteps of the Lord Jesus, vice might be abated in the world, religion might flourish and increase, and thus glory, in a larger sense and in a fuller measure, might wait on the Name of the Lord, and through the Offering on the Cross, the world being cleansed, that the communion of saints in heaven might be enlarged and made full, so that God over all should be glorified more and more.

The words "peace on earth" are also easy of interpretation. "Peace on earth" may well be expected to spring up wherever the Gospels of the Lord are heard and obeyed; and this thought gives us one reason why this prayer, so full of loving-kindness, might have been uttered. At our Saviour's birth the angels knew that a Gospel was about to be spread over the earth, full of mercy, purity, and justice; they knew that its doctrines were to have free course among the nations, and with that pure joy which angels would feel, they foresaw that good hereafter would be more triumphant, that a new and a kinder age would begin in the world. Hence might well arise their exulting song, "Peace upon earth and good will among men." They looked back to the words of the Prophet Isaiah, when in the Spirit of the Lord he prophesied that spiritual

peace and security which would come upon the world when the Gospel was spread forth; they saw the time fulfilled when, in his beautiful picture, “the wolf should dwell with the lamb, when the leopard should lie down with the kid, the calf, and the young lion, and the fatling together, and a little child should lead them^b;” now were they looking for the time foretold, when wrong should be weakened and should appear more seldom, when strife and angry dealings should be lessened, when innocence and gentleness should be more safe and more beloved; and their benevolence warming and exulting in what they foresaw, they gave to the world the assurance and joy of hearing that peace and good will would be offered to her. They foresaw that the Gospels would produce a decrease of crime in the world, and this they well knew to be sure ground for an increase of peace among men.

Many of us know little of the vicious habits of men when the Gospel light first rose among the Gentiles; many of us, therefore, little know how much thankfulness we owe to God, in that He hath thus extended to us His word; many of us have a slender knowledge of the tyrannies, the violences, the cruelties one towards another which then prevailed upon the earth. At that period the greater part of mankind were slaves to the remainder, and were the victims of their passions and their lusts.

^b Isaiah xi. 6.

Vice at that period was not only perpetual and established, but, in many shapes of sin, was held to be no vice at all. Even their worship offered to idols was often defiled by shameful or cruel vices; and crime, thus warranted by their religious practices, spread forth without rebuke or control over the heathen world. It always follows that insecurity from wrongs and misery advance upon a people as their vices advance; and therefore, when the Lord Christ came, mankind were suffering such-like distresses as the consequences of their sins. History indeed tells us that this was the case, and we also know that vice and misery went on increasing, until God's Word having gathered power, and Gospel righteousness having established itself more and more widely, the feelings and the customs of mankind gradually grew better and better, so that happiness and peace became more strengthened and enlarged.

All this was well foreseen by the angels who are dwellers with Eternity. They had long looked down in pity on a world of which, in his time, the Apostle said, "It groaneth and travaileth in pain together until now^c." They pitied the miserable condition of man, they saw his state of labour and sorrow; and knowing the gracious change which the Word of God would bring upon the earth, and foreseeing better times to follow from the teaching of the Lord God, foreseeing more godliness and fewer sins, they

^c Rom. viii. 22.

rejoiced to foretell that peace on earth which they saw to be approaching, and they went forward in their minds on that "highway of the Lord made straight^d," which was to render all, who will walk therein, more happy, and more like unto the saints in glory, and which was to advance the Name, the glory, and the peace of God among all people.

Lastly, on this point it may be that the angels of heaven gave glory to God, because they foresaw that that submission to the will of God, that peace of mind under God's trials, which the Gospels bestow, was now about to be made known fully to the world. No doubt the angels find no small portion of their peace in their obedience; it is said of them that "they do His commandments hearkening to the voice of His Word^e;" their submission to God's will is the stay and comfort of their souls; and this obedience they saw was about to be given as a rule and a support to the whole world, therefore they burst forth in gratitude to God, "Glory be to God in the highest."

My brethren, the peace which arises from submission to the will of God is by far the best and most perfect peace on earth; it leads also to the peace which is in heaven, for it arises in our hearts because the soul is in a right frame, and it tends to keep it there. It is the most perfect peace on earth, and it may be the portion of every one in the world,

^d Isa. xl. 3.

^e Ps. ciii. 20.

because it suits itself to the circumstances of every one; it is the best peace, because it lifts the mind above the world in which we dwell at present, and fixes our hopes upon that everlasting world in which the God of all peace dwelleth for ever.

Before the birth of Christ what was there to comfort a man in worldly distress? Was there the knowledge of another and a better life? By no means. There were indeed thoughts, imaginations, speculations in abundance upon this point; thoughts and speculations which proved nothing more than in what a sea of doubt without a compass the mind was wandering; there were hopes among the heathens, more or less strong, more or less reasonable, that another life might open to man after the grave had received him here; but there was no certainty, no promise whatever from that God, "who is not a man, that He should lie',"—no promise whatever that death is the gate to life eternal. Accordingly, in distress it was not uncommon for them to give themselves up as lost. Often they attempted to rush out of their troubles by self-murder; and this extreme impatience under the hand of God was mostly held to be a sort of heroic greatness of mind. The wretched man often then considered that he was the victim of evil fates, that he was appointed to misery, that the short pittance of his days was to be unhappiness; so in his impatience he put forth his hand

¹ Numb. xxiii. 19.

and slew God's work, rather than submit to God's rule. There was then little or nothing of that calm and blessed peace which spreads itself over an unhappy spirit now, as it says within itself,—“Wait a little while! This sorrow is but for a short time; this bitter trial is not for long; misery beneath the sun is only of a few days! But there is a place where she is not known, where she cannot abide, where neither pain, nor grief, nor want can dwell, where every fear which can vex me now is denied a dwelling-place, or even an entrance. Wait till I enter in there! wait in humbleness under God; because there I may stay for ever in peace, in fulness, in all the joys that are pure and good; where everything that is holy, everything which will exalt me, will be my life, and my reward for ever and ever! wait in patience for a little while!”

So also, before the life beyond the grave had been revealed through the Lord Christ, what was there, if a man had led a prosperous life, to comfort him in death? what did a heathen look forward to as he left a happy life? Did he say, “Behold, I go to another and a better state! I am passing away from this world's wealth, which for a short time I have enjoyed, in order that I may enter another life, where everything which pleased me here will seem like dross and worthlessness; where I shall look down and smile in pity upon the joys, the satisfactions, the distinctions of the world, and shall despise myself because I took a comfort in them!”

Could this kind of speech be heard when the prosperous heathen was called to go away from his plenty, or from his state? Nothing of the kind! He might guess indeed, he might hope, he might think it likely that there might be a better existence in another world; but not one of their wisest or their best reasoners or scholars ever ventured to speak of it at all as a certainty. When death was at a distance, he might make it a curious question, an interesting enquiry what would happen after the tomb; but when the king of terrors stood at the bedside and beckoned the spirit away, cold would be the comfort, small the assurance, poor would be the reliance to be drawn from a holiday discussion and an ingenious enquiry.

A very wise and good man, looking over great wealth, luxury, and state, turned away with a shudder, and said, "These be the things which make the deathbed hard!" Well was the condition of the rich heathen painted in those beautiful words of the Wise Man, "O death, how bitter is the remembrance of thee to a man that liveth at rest in his possessions, unto the man that hath nothing to vex him, and that hath prosperity in all things^s." This man feared the coming of death, because he believed it would deprive him of all enjoyment; and he dreaded the remembrance of it, because it brought home to his mind the certainty that the time was approaching

^s Ecclus. xli. 1.

when this deprivation must come. It was the Gospel which took away this terror, and placed within our reach peace in the stead of it; it was the Gospel which told us that to the rich as well as to the poor, to the happy as well as to the wretched, "it is gain to die^h," and that "to be with Christ is far betterⁱ." It is the Gospel which has fulfilled the prophecy spoken by Hosea, "O death, I will be thy plague^k;" for the Gospel has overruled death, and has despoiled him of all his terrors in the eyes of all those who follow its laws: it has told us that death is a passage forward, and a change, not a destruction; that in dying we lose nothing which we can call our own, and that we go on through Christ to have all things for evermore.

Man cannot, however, dive into angels' minds; nor can we scan the amount of their feelings, nor measure the benevolence of their hopes, when they ushered the Lord Jesus into the world with their song of joy and thanksgiving. Nevertheless these thoughts and enquiries have a benefit, because they exalt our minds to contemplate purer spirits than our own, and as we advance in such contemplations, we are in the way to render our own tempers more pure. But there is one practical benefit which will always result to us from finding out as far as we are able the meaning of any text, from reckoning up, as far as we can, what is "the breadth and length, and depth

^h Philip. i. 21.

ⁱ Ib. 23.

^k Hosea xiii. 14.

and height of the love of Christ which passeth knowledge¹," which is, that we are then more prepared to examine ourselves by it, and to learn whether we have lived in obedience or in forgetfulness of what it teaches.

Let us, then, end this sermon with some act of self-examination, and may God bless it to us, that we may discover every point wherein we may have offended, now, while we have yet time graciously given us to return into pardon through Jesus Christ. When our Lord Christ was born upon the earth, after the flesh, the angels sang, "Glory to God in the highest, on earth peace, good will towards men!" we may, therefore, safely infer that the "Glory to God" and the "peace on earth" which the angels proclaimed with triumph were to be derived from the Gospel covenant, which the Lord Christ was about to establish with mankind.

How far, then, have we advanced either the "glory of God" or "peace among men" by our obedience to the laws of Christ? This is one of the commonest questions which is addressed to you from the pulpit, and it is perhaps a question which is entertained by us with as much unwillingness as any which is proposed to us; it is a question, however, which, if fairly accepted, would shew us at once how far Christ rules in our hearts and how far Satan, and therefore, in whatever points we are guilty, would

¹ Eph. iii. 18, 19.

bring us to a knowledge of our sin, and thence would lead us to the fear of God, and so towards prayer and repentance. No wonder then, whenever the preacher says, "Examine your past lives by the Gospel," if the tempter whisper, "Do it not; put it off; there is time; you are as good as you need to be; better than others are." These are the common suggestions of Satan, and they are very commonly listened to; so commonly, that when one can be found who does, with serious endeavours, recal his past life to remembrance, who looks honestly into its errors, and weighs well its crimes, there are multitudes who, while they allow the necessity of such a course, never enter upon it at all. The text, however, given us by the Church to-day, tells us, as it ought to be understood, what is the great object and plan of the Gospel, and therefore it warns us to enquire how far our lives have set forward that object, or stood out against it, "thwarting the Spirit of God." It plainly proclaims to us a Saviour, Whom we may never see; a Gospel promise which we may never enjoy.

Let me ask, then, some few plain questions, and leave the matter to your consciences. What, my brethren, in obedience to the Gospel, are you in the habit of doing to advance the glory of God? No one will doubt, even if this song of the angels had not proclaimed it, no one will doubt that our first duty is to advance the glory of the Lord, our Creator, above all other things. Have you, then,

shewn yourselves careful to glorify His Name whenever you could?

We may examine this very readily by asking what is our obedience to one commandment, the fourth. One day in seven the Lord has hallowed; one day in seven is the Lord's day. The Lord's day is to be a day of rest; on that day there is to be no hindrance to stay us in our setting forward the glory of God; there is to be nothing, and there is nothing, to call us a contrary way. How then is the Lord's day kept? Are there any whose consciences must tell them of God's house, God's worship neglected, in some cases almost deserted, in an idle, careless, godless temper? Are there any who spend God's day in hardening their hearts against God? who waste it idly at home, wilfully neglecting the hearing of God's Word, wickedly refusing to draw near unto Him with praises and thanksgivings; blindly refusing the blessings of prayer, the consolations, and the strengthening of confession of sin? My brethren, what parish is there which will not bear witness against many a soul which spends the Sabbath in hard-hearted idleness and neglect of God? This is so common, that some seem to hold it as a small thing; a small thing to stand forth, and by practice, to say, I will not confess my sins in God's house; I will not draw near unto God in praise; I will not put my trust in God in prayer; and God's day shall be so spent as to withhold from God His honour, and to make myself

less His servant than I was the day before. This some people come to consider a small thing! My brethren, it is a great sin!

But while some spend the day of the Lord in hardening their hearts by neglect and idleness, are there none who do worse? are there none who make it a day for dishonouring God? Do not some spend the Sabbath in loose living, in drinking, in swearing, and coarse low habits? Is this to “do all to the glory of God^m?” Is this to be walking with Jesus Christ? Few parishes there are wherein we shall not find such persons; this year has passed over the heads of many such in this land, and has brought them therefore so much nearer to condemnation.

But to ask one more question: In every parish how many will attend at the Holy Communion? Usually out of the whole number a very few. Before we “eat of that bread and drink of that cupⁿ” we are commanded to lay down all ill will, all malice, and enmity. If this was done by all, and then all knelt at that Table, surely “peace on earth and good will towards men” would be multiplied amongst us. We are commanded also to examine ourselves, to resolve to lead a “new life,” to eschew sins which grieve our consciences, and to beseech God to accept our repentances, and to bestow grace upon us to lead holier and better lives, and so to “draw near with faith.” If in one solemn service held “in re-

^m 1 Cor. x. 31.

ⁿ 1 Cor. xi. 28.

membrance of Him," we did thus, from time to time, purify our hearts, and dedicate ourselves, "our souls and bodies," unto God, would not the Lord be more glorified by us? I know one reason why so many turn their backs on the Holy Communion is, because they cannot as yet resolve to give up some worldly or wrong habit. Now, no doubt, there is a sort of tenderness of conscience in abstaining on this ground; a man is not wholly hardened who dreads to bring a wilful and wicked heart to the Holy Supper of the Lord; but in what state is the man himself? What is the use of any of his religious services, as long as he determines to keep any sin in his heart? Is the Lord God any God at all to him while he chooses to set up in his own breast,—his breast which ought to be and which might be a temple of the Holy Ghost,—is the Lord any God to him who will set up in his own breast a sin above God, who will maintain the sin there, and worship and serve it, who sacrifices to it his life hour by hour, day by day? Is Christ Jesus any Saviour to that man? He has never made any such promise! This is the day when Christ was born; but to that man he is not born; that man is where the heathens were, as long as he will live like a heathen; he is "dead in trespasses and sins°!"

There are many ways full of grace, but too many for the compass of a sermon, in which we are called

° Eph. ii. 1.

by the Gospels to advance the glory of God, and to labour to bring peace upon the earth. I have only touched on two. If it is common to find people faulty in these, it is too likely that they are faulty in many more. Let every man search his own heart. We stand now on a solemn point of time; the day, namely, which brought the Lord to save us, the day also which brings us close to the end of another year, and therefore so much nearer to that Day when we shall see Christ our Lord in judgment.

A long step in the lives of each of us is now gone! One more of the "threescore years and ten," if we ever reckon them, is taken away! It is, no doubt, the last some of us will ever see. My brethren, let us take these truths into our hearts. "Whatever sin most easily besets us," I would adjure you, for the welfare and peace of man, for the glory of God, for the sake of Christ, for the sake of your own souls,—I would adjure you, by wrestling with Satan, by struggling against the flesh, by repentance, by prayer,—to work together with Christ, your helper and Redeemer, to arise against your destruction and to cast it off.

SERMON VI.

First Sunday after Christmas,

OR

LAST SUNDAY IN THE YEAR.

SONG OF SOLOMON iv. 16.

Awake, O north wind ; and come, thou south ; blow upon my garden, that the spices thereof may flow out. Let my Beloved come into His garden, and eat His pleasant fruits.

THIS verse is one of the many beautiful likenings and similitudes in the Song of Solomon. It is a prayer from the Church that the Holy Spirit would visit her, comfort her, and nourish her ; that her virtues might flow out, and that Christ her Saviour might come into her courts, and rejoice in her good fruits. In the words, "Awake, O north wind, and come, thou south," is contained the prayer for the Spirit of the Lord ; in the words, "Blow upon my garden, that the spices may flow out," is the prayer that God's Spirit would render her fruitful in holiness ; and in the words, "Let my Beloved come into His garden, and eat His pleasant fruits," is the prayer that Christ, when He visits His Church, may find it rich in a faithful obedience.

This is the meaning of the text, only slightly hid-

den under a beautiful likeness. It is not uncommon in the Bible to find the Church described as a garden, a vineyard, a vine, and a pleasant plant, and this is one of these descriptions. The wisdom of the Lord often speaks many things in one word; and when, my brethren, we are called a garden, we learn much from that name; if we are a garden, then are we loved as a garden is; there is One that tilleth, that laboureth, that watereth, and dresseth it; there is One that pruneth the wild branches, and grafteth in the good; there is One that plucketh up the weeds thereof, and soweth the good seed; there is One that looketh for the increase, and that One is God. When the Lord calls us His garden, His vineyard, His pleasant plant, this is what in one word He tells us that He doeth unto us.

But if this is the carefulness of the Master of the garden, what should be seen within the hedge thereof? The same word 'garden' tells us that there should be seen flourishing, and in order, plants that are sweet and plants that are beautiful, and the ground below should bear fruits sweet-scented and nourishing; the eye should be pleased with the beauty, and the smell with the odour of it, and it should bring forth abundantly things wholesome and delightful. And this is what a good man's heart is: so it is watered, so it is tended and regarded, and so it bringeth forth a rich obedience, good to all mankind, and around it there seems to float a sweet and sacred sanctity; the spices of god-

liness flow out a sweet-smelling savour, and we see that in that heart God is working, and man is yielding fruit. How much, my brethren, doth God often say unto us in one small word?

My brethren, we have now just kept holy the day in which Christ, the Beloved, first came in the flesh to visit us in this mortal life, and that sacred day has again brought us to the end of another closing year. Let us then, in the last service of the year, look back upon the workings of the Lord among us; let us consider some points in which God's Spirit has laboured—may I not say, has toiled—wrestled, striven with many of us, and then ask what “spices have flowed out,” what “pleasant fruits” there be; or whether, in the words of the Prophet's lamentation, we “have turned the fruit of righteousness into hemlock^a.”

Now there is no doubt but in this year which is gone, many of you have had your troubles; difficulties and distresses have visited many, sorrows have come into some households, disappointments into all. It is God's mercy that it is so. Sorrows, we all know, are a sore burden, and “a wounded spirit who can bear^b?” And speaking only as a man, I could well say for you all,—May God keep every trouble from you; let it all be peace and joy, let grief depart away for ever, let tears for evermore be dried up. But a little thought tells us this would not be for our good. If every thing in this world

^a Amos vi. 12.

^b Prov. xviii. 14.

was pleasant and happy, who would ever be ready to go? when the time came, who would meet death with willingness? who would feel prepared to lay down life, and leave this world, if life was no load, if the world was a world of joy?

When a man is in deep sorrow, and when sorrow seems to have no ending place, he begins to look to death as an escape from it. But his Bible tells him,—and even if he has lived with his Bible shut, and has turned his ear from God's ministers,—then his own sense tells him that death is no peaceful place unless he is fit to die. Something says the corn that is blighted, the ear that is mildewed, is not fit for the garner,—it is cast out; and this makes him pray. Still something says, further, unless the heart is clean, the words of the mouth are nothing, and this makes him search himself, makes him look into his own heart, that well-spring of deceit, selfishness, pride and lusts, and then he trembles: fearful, and utterly cast down, he throws himself before the feet of Christ, begs for help, implores forgiveness, cleaves to Jesus as the beloved Son of the great Father who made him, as the Redeemer Who died for him, to Him Who reconciled, by His own blood, His creation, wherein is sin, to the eternal justice of the Godhead; and thus while the sinner offers up a broken heart, even as it were before the throne of Christ, a deep “repentance, never to be repented of,” begins; the loving-kindness of the

Lord finds a room where it may spread, grace finds a bosom where it may enter in, and salvation opens forth. Many a rich berry grows on a prickly branch, and this is the heavenly fruit which God's sorrows may bring. My brethren, I need not look after every sorrow that every year brings with it, but I must ask, Have your sorrows borne their fruit with you? Grievings, as well as any other things, may be stifled with worldliness, and if the thorns choke the plant, there is no fruit upon it.

People sometimes say a great sorrow is a sacred sorrow; deep griefs, rightly cultivated, are very sacred things. Have yours, this year, been so blessed? Have your fears, have your griefs, have your difficulties, have your wants and doubts brought you closer to your Father? That is the meaning of the Lord; when you are afflicted, God does not grieve you to hurt you, but to draw you: these are the uses of affliction. My brethren, if many a sinner knew his own condition, and felt anxious to be at peace, he would be led to make, what he would now think a strange prayer, he would be led to say, "Break my heart, O Lord, even if it be with affliction; humble my spirit, bring me to Thee, even if by grief and sorrow. Come blighting disappointments, come cold fears. 'Awake, O north wind,' destroy my worldly-mindedness, and wither up my crop of sin: leave me bare; strip me, and leave me wanting, so that I learn how poor the world is, and turn from it, and find God!"

But God's mercies are great, and all the world is not disappointment, though we deserve it. Many things there are wonderful in the world, but if a man thinks on our sinfulness at all, then among the most wonderful would seem God's mercies. The love and the goodness of the Lord are infinite; they are as large as His knowledge and His justice; they spread over everything, and run abroad over all the earth. Mercy is so strong that our vices do not stop her, and neglect, insult, contradiction, and rebellion continue long before they can thrust back from us the loving-kindness of our Master and Redeemer, the Lord Jesus Christ. And so it is that God's goodnesses are so common amongst us, else, if every sin was visited, a mercy would seem a miracle. We live in Satan's sins, and we live on God's mercies. Put this saying, and this year, side by side; tell up your own sins, and tell up God's goodnesses, and who can reckon the amount of his offences, and the amount of loving-kindnesses?

My brethren, a poor afflicted parent who thinks for, who defends, who labours for, and feeds a wicked, a spendthrift, an unnatural and ungrateful child, withered as his hopes are, broken as is his joy, still has not a heart so wearied with sin, a spirit so thwarted, so grieved with wicked vexations, as the Spirit of the Lord Jesus Christ is grieved and thwarted with the iniquities of His creation. A parent strives with one evil child, the Lord strives with all. Such is the way in which this year goes

out: it goes, and what a mass of witnesses it carries with it to rise up against us; it goes, but though departing loaded, as it were, with anger, still it leaves us like a sincere and sorrowing friend; it gives us plain, good, unanswerable advice; it says, in a manner, "I depart, and I must, when my time comes, speak many bitter things against you; I must lay down the load of your deeds before your face, and leave you weeping beside it. But must these things be for ever? Much have I spoken to you of Jesus Christ; much have I said to you of His loving-kindness and redemption; often have I told you of His Blood; often have I called on you to come unto Him; often have I said, Repent, leave off your sins, bend the knee, bow the heart; be humbled to the dust, be sincere, be penitent, warmly, deeply penitent before Jesus Christ. These have been my words. Now I go away, but in God's grace, and by His mercy, before I go, I repeat them. Here, in the midst of the temple of the Lord, I lift up my voice; here, my last hour in which you will meet before God together, I seize upon the time to say, Repent! repent! make God your friend! Let me depart, a lost, a defeated, a polluted year; but let the last words, I can utter, prevail, and be ye stirred up: beseech God, and resolve, and, on my ruins, in all coming time, build up a humble, an obedient, a repentant, and a working life."

When you look back upon the mercies of the last year, these are some of the words which she speaks

to you. Are they not words which make you pray to God, and say, "O Lord, forsake me not in coming time, but still uphold me in Thy mercies. O Lord, remember not how I have received Thy goodnesses, nor with what a thankless heart. But try me yet again, O Lord, with Thy loving-kindnesses, and make every mercy pierce my heart, and prove to me a call. So, O Lord, still call me, even as a father calls his child, in gentle tones, and with the voice of love. And so change me, change me, gracious God, that, though childlike in my weak and staggering steps, still in the love, in the simpleness, in the joyous confidence of a little child, I may ever run in obedience to Thy voice."

My brethren, I pray you end this service in some such plain and Christian prayer, and then the last Sunday in this year may be, by God's mercy, the beginning of His greatest gift on earth, "the peace of God."

If I were to bring before you all the reasons why we do not seriously consider the many mercies and the many corrections with which every passing year visits us, I should then very far pass beyond the limits of a sermon. But I will touch upon one reason why we shut our eyes to the plain and clear truth that God is in everything which befalls us, and that is because we measure our state of grace, not by God's Word, but by the lives of our neighbours. Now, when we do this, we never take a better liver for our standard, but a worse liver than

ourselves : because, if we compared ourselves with a better Christian, his more clear example would convict us of sin, and discomfort us ; but when we measure ourselves by one who is far shorter in grace and godliness than we are, then we get a sort of consolation and an encouragement to do that which no man can do wisely, namely, to think well of ourselves. When a man is disturbed in conscience, then he readily says, "Is my life wrong? then what is my neighbour's? Tell me what I do wrong, and I will shew you numbers who do infinitely worse!" This is very common, and then we are easily brought to be extremely careless in seeing God in His dealings with us. Because, finding others worse than ourselves, as almost any man may, we soon come to look on God's mercies, not as mercies, but as what we may reasonably look for and expect ; and we look on God's visitations, not as corrections and recalling admonitions, but as accidents and ill luck ; and so far from considering punishments as deserved, we wonder and are almost ready to charge God for permitting them to visit us. Now, this is comforting ourselves with our own works ; and when we do that, we are always in Satan's hands. However, nothing is more pleasing to pride, nothing more easy and more consoling than to say, "If I am intemperate, I am not a thief, I hurt no one but myself ; if I am a thief, I am not blood-thirsty, I do not murder ; if I am covetous of my neighbour's goods, I am not an adulterer ; if I am a loose liver,

I am not false, I do not slander nor backbite, nor bear false witness." Nothing is more easy nor more true than these excuses, because what do they amount to but this, "If I do sin against God in the way that I am fond of, I do not commit vices which I dislike?" My brethren, does any one ever suppose that you would?

However, this is one of the common false comforts which arise amongst us when we measure our lives, not by the Bible, but by one another. Satan's joy over you and his expectation of your souls is very great when he brings you to this comparison of your lives one with the other. He is glad, because then you are judging each other, which you are commanded not to do; and he expects your souls, because then you are nearly certain not to repent, nor to improve, which you are commanded to do. Satan's great labour is to shorten God's glory, and so, in a sort, to triumph over Christ, and to bring us and all mankind, who are born to be blessed angels and dwellers in the glory of heaven, into sin, disgrace, and eternal perdition. This is Satan's labour, cunningly disguised under many plausibilities, and temptations, and deceits. Does it matter in our destroyer's eyes how we are destroyed, so that we do fall into hell? If a man is losing his soul as a thief, does Satan wish to tempt him to be an adulterer? if he is a loose liver, need he be covetous? if he is damning himself by covetousness, need he be a drunkard or a liar? One sin is enough for the tempter's work,

if it is cherished, excused, persevered in. If by giving you false comforts, by shewing you that others are worse, Satan can make you careless of God's goodnesses to you, careless of His punishments, if he can make you disregard your Bible and slight your minister's warnings, and can so keep back from your heart the various calls and approaches of the Spirit of grace, then one sin is enough for Satan, and far, far too heavy a burden for you. The Redeemer has set up a standard in religion, and it is the Bible-standard,—God's commandments; Satan has set up a standard also, it is the worldly standard of religion. If you measure by the worldly standard, you will be defrauded and cheated, it is not enough; if you measure yourselves by God's commandments, you will repent and pray.

These things are so plain that I will speak no more upon them; but I will end by asking you, Are there not some so careless as to be below even Satan's standard? are there not some who have spent all this year in utter heedlessness, without ever measuring themselves at all?

My brethren, in ending this sermon I will bring before your minds the last words of my text, "Let my Beloved come into His garden to eat His pleasant fruits." These words tell us that there must be fruits. The end of the year leads us to ask what is the amount of them? This we know for certain, that in this, and in every year, much has been done

that there may be fruits. We have all been tried by troubles and by mercies, we have been admonished by distresses, or by the fear of distresses. We have been allured and invited by actual benevolences. Mercies have come upon us, like the south wind in summer, loaded with warmth and plenty to melt our hard hearts, and to open our feelings to the graces of God, the graces of gratitude and repentance. One mercy, without which all the rest were vain,—the Book of God has ever been opened to you, and its truths proclaimed and spread amongst you. This mercy has been upheld, even against the wills of some who are scoffers, disbelievers, “walking after their own lusts^d.” In worldly and in spiritual blessings the goodness of God, the influence of the Holy Spirit, has through the past year been constantly poured out among you, that there might arise from the people the holy incense of believing, thankful, repenting hearts; the Spirit of God has blown upon the garden, that “the spices might flow out.”

My brethren, you must know yourselves what your return has been. At any rate, this last Sabbath asks you, and you cannot slight the question, How much better are you than you were a year ago? Look into your hearts! a year ago you had a vice there which you loved: is it there still? Throughout this year Christ has called you to cast it forth;

^d 2 Pet. iii. 3.

He has encouraged you to come to Him for help that you may be able to conquer your sin; have you really advanced to Him one single step? have you not heard His call and stood still? Look at your sin; is it less, or is it greater? Look at your Saviour; is He nearer to you, or is He farther? Look towards hell; is it farther, or is it nearer? Your end is nearer; what will be your end? You doubt perhaps, why do you doubt? are you not told what your end will be? are you not told that if you are repentant, if you are full of prayer, if you are full of belief in Christ, if full of love, that your end will be mercy, pardon, sweet forgiveness, and everlasting peace? If you exalt a sin above the cross, and keep any vice unchecked, and live in obedience to any crime, are you not told that "his servants ye are to whom ye obey?" and now cannot you see whether Satan is obeyed or not?

These, my brethren, are among the words which the last Sabbath of this year speaks unto you; she thrusts them into your ears: it is by the mercy of the Lord that thus she closes the last services of the old year; it is the last great call which God will give His congregation before the year is out. Some of you will take it willingly, and search yourselves by it. Every man will do so, who has turned towards God, every man who has opened his bosom before Christ, every one who has said, "Behold, my Judge, my Saviour,

behold my heart; see how foul! how foul! Behold my sin; how strong, how active, how sweet! See my struggles, how weak they are; my danger, how great! Behold these things, and in pity give me strength; help me to check my sin; help me to exalt Thy glory and to do good." These men will take this warning home, and will thank God Who brought them here to hear it; they will think upon it with prayer, and God's blessing will answer them.

But are there those who will cast these things away? The scoffer will; the hard-hearted will; the disbeliever will; he that loves his sin more than his God; these will cast these things behind them! My brethren, end your last service of this year with me in a prayer for these people, and say, "Merciful God, who hast made all men, and wouldest not the death of a sinner, but rather that he should be converted and live, have mercy upon them, and take from them all ignorance, hardness of heart, and contempt of Thy Word; and so fetch them home, blessed Lord, to Thy flock, that they may be saved among the remnant of the true Israelites, one fold under one Shepherd, Jesus Christ our Lord^f."

^f Collect for Good Friday.

SERMON VII.

Second Sunday after Christmas,

OR

FIRST SUNDAY IN THE YEAR.

LAMENTATIONS iii. 17, 18.

*I forgot prosperity : and I said, My strength and my
hope is perished from the Lord.*

THESE are the words of a man in despair. The Book of Lamentations was written by the Prophet Jeremiah after the Jews had been led into captivity by the Babylonians. The language of the Book is full of sorrow ; and it is loaded with pictures of the miserable and pitiful sufferings of the Israelites. Here and there a bitter complaint, like the words in my text, breaks from the lips of the Prophet, and he seems so utterly overwhelmed and cast down by the wretched condition of his countrymen, so heart-broken by the cutting insults and the grinding cruelties which they endured, that he now and then appears to despair of God's goodness ; and he lets fall words, like these before us, which seem to say that he considered himself and his country outcasts

for ever:—"He forgot prosperity; and his strength and his hope perished."

But this despair, though his grief and his punishment was so heavy, did not abide with him for ever. Though their "inheritance was turned to strangers^a;" "though their princes were hanged up^b" by their enemies; "though their young men were taken to grind^c," as slaves at the mills; though "the children fell^c" down under the burdens which were placed upon them; though the "tongue of the suckling cleaved to the roof of his mouth for thirst^d;" though "their soul was poured out into their mother's bosom^e;" though the enemy "hissed and gnashed their teeth, and said, We have swallowed her up^f," we have consumed and destroyed her; and though all this seemed fully, utterly, and most bitterly true, still the Prophet, even in this total and cruel downfall, saw God; and seeing God, like light in a tempest, he could not abide in despair. In the midst of his lamentations, in the deepest parts of his grief, ever and anon a faint hope would tremble on his lips, and he would not give up prayer altogether:—"Hide not Thine ear," he beseeches the Lord,—“hide not Thine ear at my breathing, at my cry^g!” He knows that his griefs are from the Hand of God, and in the depths of his affliction, in the smarting of his wounds, he turns his prayer to the

^a Lam. v. 2. ^b Ib. 12. ^c Ib. 13. ^d Ib. iv. 4.

^e Ib. ii. 12. ^f Ib. 16. ^g Ib. iii. 56.

Hand that smiteth him, because he knows that It is full of love:—"The Lord will not cast off for ever; though He cause grief, yet will He have compassion^h."

My brethren, entering, by the blessing of the Lord, on a new year, starting on a new course of trials, having another period, seemingly spread open before us, in which to seek God, I wish to preach to you on this part of the Prophet's conduct; on his afflictions; on his despair; on his trembling hope that would not be put down; and to apply his case to ourselves.

That which the Israelites suffered on account of their manifold sins in their worldly estate, we may always apply to ourselves in our spiritual estate. When they fell in the deepest afflictions, and were led into captivity for their sins, we may always take from their condition a spiritual lesson, and remember that if we suffer our sins to lead us also into captivity, afflictions and griefs will follow with great weight, and in great numbers.

When a sinner reckons up his sins,—and all sinners, stifle their thoughts as they may, must reckon sometimes,—when a sinner comes to have some sight of his continued evil life; when he sees how many his sins have been, how reckless his life, how regardless of God's laws; when he remembers that this evil course was persevered in against all God's mercies; when

^h Lam. iii. 31, 32.

he sees how often he has injured mankind by it; when he remembers how often the Lord awakened better feelings in his bosom, how often the Lord touched him with some sense of thankfulness for heavenly mercies, and how often he conquered his thankful feelings, and went forward into sin; how often the Lord, when he was about to harm and injure his neighbour, touched his heart with pity, and how often he conquered pity, and went on into cruelty or wrong; how often the Lord threatened in his ears, and awakened fear for his own soul, and he shut his ears, and pushed fear aside, and went into fresh wickedness; when he remembers how often God called him by His ministry, and he disregarded their voice, derided them, neglected them; when he remembers in how many strivings with his sinking soul the Holy Spirit laboured, and how resolutely he resisted, till he subdued the given graces of God, and in a determined spirit went forward to be a reprobate,—when these things come into a sinner's mind, then he begins to feel what spiritual affliction is; then he begins to say, “What a wild, what a wilful, what a wicked course I have run! What calls I have received, what goodnesses I have received, what wickednesses I have given back! My neighbour and my God have suffered me, and endured me; I have risen up to fight against both! I have been led away captive in sin; where am I now? what is my hope?”

This is the sinner's question; and like the Pro-

phet in his tribulation, he borders close upon despair. The Prophet might have a righteous hope for himself, because he was godly, he was obedient to the Spirit. The Prophet despaired for the sinful people; but the sinner despairs of himself. "Worthless to the Lord God," says he, "was my spirit, when it was comparatively pure, when it was simple in infancy, and unoffending; worthless to the Lord God when it was at its best! What is it now?" "Condemned, it may be!" says conscience, in a "strong sense of sin;" "Condemned!" says fear, "looking forward towards judgment!" "Condemned!" says his common sense, "looking up to God's purity, God's love of goodness, God's justice!" And the sinner stands upon the verge of despair.

There is one, and only one thing, that says unto him, "Uncondemned, even yet! even yet, uncondemned!" and that is God's blessed Word. But is he left in quiet to look to that? Does Satan let a soul, so much entangled, slip so easily through his grasp? No! but he turns the eyes of the trembling sinner away from God's Book, and bids him look upon his past life. "Look there," he cries, "and do you expect forgiveness? The Bible promises forgiveness indeed, if it is a true book,—promises forgiveness to the sinner that is repentant: but is that you? Have you not had your repentant moments, and did you not stifle them? Have you not had your calls, as these Gospels call them, and did you not tread them under foot, and march

boldly on into vice? Has not God dealt with you in every way, and have you not in every way repelled God? Are you one of those to whom the promises of that Book, if true they are, are held out and given? Look at the justice of the Lord! Is it justice to reward with everlasting glory such a life as yours? Look how pure this Bible says God is! Look at your spotted life: does not God abominate you? Look how benevolent, how merciful this Bible paints its God! See how violent and unjust you have been! Can you and God ever come together? Think of these things, and you may follow your own ways; for if there is another world, as that Book says, you can never be happy there."

This is how Satan perplexes, bewilders a sinner, when he finds him startled at his sins, staggering under them, and stopping to think if he cannot even yet throw off the load, and escape away to the mercy of the Lord. Satan strives with every subtlety to bring him to despair, to make him doubt the pardon of his own soul, as the Prophet doubted of the Jews; both alike seeming too bad ever to be accepted into forgiveness again. This labour of Satan's bears fruit; not a few of the wicked lead reckless lives from feelings of despair! They are brought to think themselves so far gone, so much sunk in wickedness and offence, that there is no place for pardon left: this is not uncommon, and many a sinner is living a reckless life now, because he has first been tempted into despair. Neither is this

wonderful, because all Satan's arguments are true, if the Bible is to be shut. Keep the promises of Christ's mercies to the repentant sinner out of sight, and then all that Satan says is true and sensible. Vice ought to be punished; injustice, uncleanness, falsehood, dishonesty, ought to be punished; and if God's gracious promises and calls are kept out of view, it will seem true at once that they must be punished. My brethren, as many are sinners,—shall I not say, as we are all sinners?—let us open that Book, and turn to the refuge that God has given us. If there is one in despair, one at all turning into that dark and fatal path, let him consider how great is God's love towards us, and then he will see some ground to build his hope upon.

My brethren, consider how the Lord deals with you, and that consideration is enough to awaken hope at once. The Bible describes every condition of man, and sets before us the feelings towards the children of men which move in the bosom of the Lord Jesus Christ. This is the manner in which, as the Book of Wisdomⁱ tells us, our Lord deals with sinners:—"Them that offend Thou chastenest by little and by little, and warnest them by putting them in remembrance wherein they have offended, that leaving their wickedness they may believe on Thee, O Lord!"

My brethren, is not this a very true description?

ⁱ Wisdom xii. 2.

Examine your past days. What have the sins been? What has the chastisement been? Has the anger of the Lord hitherto at all equalled the wickedness of the man? You have all heard of God's judgments; possibly some of you may have seen sinners drop down in the midst of their sin. Some may have seen the passionate man fall dead in his fight; some may have seen the drunkard die in his drunken fit. These things do happen; but very seldom, you will say. Yes, my brethren, very seldom; but why seldom? Are they seldom because the sin is "a little one^k?" or because such sins are seldom? Not so; but because the mercies of the Lord are great and manifold. These are the reasons why punishment does not always follow instantly upon sin, and cut off at once the offender from the earth.

Now, then, look upon your past lives! How many such sins have you committed? how many greater sins? Here, however, by the mercy of God, you still continue; by the yet greater mercy of the Lord, here you have now been conducted into His very temple,—His temple, sanctified by Jesus Christ Himself,—to receive another call from the especial ministry of the Lord Christ, ordained also by Himself.

The Lord never calls you in order that you should increase your sin by throwing away a call. Every Sabbath call which is vouchsafed to you is in itself

^k . Genesis xix. 20.

a proof that there is yet an opportunity, a place for repentance and acceptance. The Lord has shewn you in other persons what He can do when a sinner is ripe. When one is cut off in his wickedness, and hurried out of life with his sin upon his head, then the Lord shews to those who remain what He can do when the measure is full and running over, and when He makes bare His arm. But He has not done this to any of us. We have not been called out of this life suddenly, to bear our sin in our hands into the very presence of the angels and the Son of God. God has not sent to us a sudden punishment; but He has sent another call.

These things ought to touch us with repentance, with the love of God, as well as with hope. In these dealings with sinners the Lord shews both how He can punish, and how He abhors to punish. And then consider again: though you are not cut off in your sins, still is there no chastisement at all? is there no warning? no remembrance? Not so. None of us are allowed by the Lord to walk in sin and to walk at peace. Shame walks with us, fear is with us, conscience is with us, with her reproaches. Oftentimes God gives us over to be detected, and the hand of man visits us with some punishment. This is the sinner's path. He is chastened every step he takes in it. The chastenings are mercifully given "by little and little," but they are nevertheless constantly given.

Through the last year, my brethren, every advance that has been made in sin has been an advance in disquiet and in unhappiness. I know that there is not one of you that will not say that this is true: and every time that you have stopped in your sins, and made any kind of return towards repentance, then peace has, for the time, come back to you again; the "Comforter has come," because then you were, for the time, in the Spirit. God then visited you with another invitation, another trial was vouchsafed, whether you would "fight the good fight of faith," or whether you would again "fight against God¹." And as long as you obeyed that invitation, and "walked with God^m," so long there was peace and hope, and the sorrows and the fears of sinfulness began to grow less.

This is the manner in which Christ has dealt with us through the last year; and, indeed, all our lives long. There have been warnings many, but light and merciful; chastenings followed us, but gentle and fatherly. And when we turned back from our offences, then our hearts grew lighter, and encouragements were sent to us, gentle, merciful, and fatherly. Everything done to save us, nothing done to destroy us. My brethren, these are the things which you have felt and known. But they tell you how great is the long-suffering and the loving-kindness of God. They warn you to fear,

¹ 1 Tim. vi. 12; Acts v. 39.

^m Gen. v. 22.

lest you wear out the patience of the Most High ; they pray you, they urge you to come into the loving-kindness of the Lord.

My brethren, I know not, but you know well, how you have accepted these kind, these fatherly dealings. You know what fruit they have borne amongst you. You know whether you have cast goodness behind you, and have taken Satan as a companion and fellow-traveller. But this I may say ; if any sin has the mastery over you, for the sake of your souls, and in Christ's Name, abide no longer in such a fellowship. Do not despair : there is still a place to come in ! How long the gate will be set open no one can say, but it is not yet shut ; because God has permitted you to come here, and to hear these words, you may be sure that He will receive you even now, if you will in truth come in. Do not look back to your early and innocent days, and then despair when you see the sins of your latter days. Do not say, "Yes, once I was innocent, once I was pure, once I loved God, once I could pray to Him in love and in trust, and 'could lay me down in peace,' because I could feel that 'the Lord sustained me' ;" but these holy times went when my virtues went ; and I must not look for these again : I am too far gone, I must forget that prosperity, and my strength and my hope are perished from the Lord."

My brethren, say not things like these, and so give the struggle up. Remember, indeed, your innocent days, and weep over them, and covet them ; remember your sins, but never forget God's mercies ; keep your self-abasement, it can never be too low ; keep your self-condemnation. These feelings become us all, and befit every child of man. But let drop despair.

My brethren, there may be much sin amongst us : there is much sin. So also there was much sin among the Jews ; but when their self-abasement began, then began also God's promises :—" Fear not, thou worm Jacob, and ye men of Israel ; I will help thee, saith the Lord, and thy Redeemer, the Holy One of Israel^o." My brethren, no doubt their sins are also our sins : but if their repentances are our repentances, no doubt their Redeemer is our Redeemer also.

Lastly, I have entered on this subject because we are now beginning a new year. A new year seems like a new course set open to us. It looks like another trial. We appear to have a fresh space given us, in which we may take new courses and begin a new life. I cannot help believing that this is the meaning of our merciful God in giving us more time, and another year. It is the mercy of the Lord that thus sets before us another period, and gives us another opportunity of making our

peace with 'Him before we die. When our time is extended, it is not that we may extend our sins, but that we may begin our obedience. It is not that we may do Satan's work more abundantly, but that we may serve God in newness of life, and do good. This is the moving reason why the Lord God prolongs the days of a sinner. It is God's good will that, however late, still he may come into repentance, bringing forth good fruits, and, by God's mercy, for Christ's sake, may at last stand among the pardoned. I cannot believe but that, while the Lord prolongs our days, it is that we may employ our time aright, in amending our hearts, in obeying God's Word, in doing good to mankind. I cannot but believe that this is the will of God concerning us; and then I feel sure, because I stand on the promises of God, that if we do so use the time which is given us, that we shall come within that forgiveness which God bestows for the sake of the Blood of Christ.

My brethren, this seems to be but what plain sense teaches and the Bible promises. But then what a hope we may build upon it, now that we have another year set before us! Does not the new year say to us,—“Come! there is yet time! come! there is the race set before us again; enter in and run in the Lord's path, and there is still a reward at the end thereof. Though hitherto you have stood still, or fled away backwards, or turned aside from the path to the right hand and the left, still you are not

yet cast away. Again you are called on, again you are invited, again the gate is set open, and the high prize is offered." My brethren, this must be what it is intended that we should do, when every new year begins for us; this must be also what is prepared for us, if we will "redeem the time^p;" this must be, because the promise stands upon the Word of the Lord.

But then, my brethren, remember, this year may be the last in which you may ever be called to enter on a new course. If it is spent in sin, or in heedlessness of the calls of God, all that we can expect is that it will be the last. Many a young person who little believes it, is now living the last year! To those of middle age, or those loaded with years, every day tells us that we may very reasonably consider this year as our last. I wish the flattering thought, "There is yet time, there is yet time," was utterly cast away. There is never time enough, as far as we know, and we may be certain there is never time enough, if we are to balance every sin by a good deed. Let us never, then, believe that we have time enough yet, in which to make sure of heaven. My brethren, a wise man looks back upon his past days and his misdeeds, and then he says,— "I have a long time done no work at all for my Master; I have a long time stood idle in the market-place,—or rather, I have stood idle within the vine-

^p Eph. v. 16.

yard after having been called into it ; I am now once more called to labour. Surely this is the eleventh hour with me. I must not now say, Wait a little longer, Lord God. I must not now say, Let me be idle still ; there is time enough to come in and to earn the wages of life ! But let me remember the time I have lost ; let me think upon the life mispent ; let me reckon up how I am creeping on in years, and how my offences grow with my age ; let me look up to heaven and say, that which I see, ‘ The night cometh when no man can work ^a ! ’ ” My brethren, would to God that the night of your days was ever among your reflections ! would to God that death, the time when you will be stretched out, helplessly waiting for the judgment, was never out of sight ! It is the only thing of which you are sure. Then I should hope that, by God’s grace, you would so make straight your paths, that you would go down to the grave Christians well worn with godly labours, and hopeful, in Christ, that your souls will be at rest.

^a John ix. 4.

SERMON VIII.

First Sunday after Epiphany.

ST. LUKE ii. 49.

Wist ye not that I must be about My Father's business.

THESE words are taken from the portion of St. Luke's Gospel which is appointed to be read in the Communion Service of this day, which is the first Sunday after the feast of Epiphany. The word *Epiphany*, as you know, means 'manifestation,' or 'shewing forth.' Epiphany was at first a name given to Christmas-day, as well as to the festival to which the Church now gives that name; because, while on the feast of Epiphany we now celebrate the appearance of the star in the East which shewed forth the dwelling-place of the infant Jesus, and led the wise men to that manifestation of Him wherein they first worshipped Him and gave their gifts, so Christmas-day was the manifestation and first shewing forth of Jesus the Redeemer to the world redeemed, and was the bringing of the Lord of the creation visibly in the flesh to repurchase by His blood an inheritance, lost and forfeited by sin. Christmas-day, therefore, was originally called by the Church the greater Epiphany, as being the great

and original manifestation ; and the feast which we now commemorate by that name in the Church was called the lesser Epiphany, as being the remembrance of an event of less importance than the birth of our heavenly Saviour, and arising out of it.

In the first Sunday after Epiphany the Church, as you have heard, directs the priest to read to her people that part of St. Luke's Gospel which tells us how that Jesus and His Mother, with Joseph, went up to Jerusalem after the custom of the feast of the Passover, our Lord having been in the flesh then about twelve years, and then bearing the stature and the form of a boy. We read that, when Joseph and His Mother, having completed the customary observances and fulfilled the days of the feast, were returning home, at the end of a day's journey they missed their Child, and returning to Jerusalem, seeking Him in sorrow, they found Him sitting in one of the porches of the Temple, where the learned Rabbis were accustomed to explain difficult passages of the Law, and to lecture on and make clear any doubts which might arise among the people. Here they found the Child Jesus, "both hearing the doctors and asking them questions^a," and astonishing all that heard Him with "His understanding and answers^b." When His mother rebuked Him for His absence from her, and for the natural anxiety and sorrow which it had occasioned her, our Lord

^a Luke ii. 46.

^b Ib. 47.

replied to her in the remarkable words, "How is it that ye sought Me? Wist ye not that I must be about My Father's business?"

It is probable this history is taken for the service of this day because the circumstance here recorded is a fresh manifestation or shewing forth of Christ the Lord. The birth of Christ and the star in the east shewed forth the coming of the Lord in the flesh; this history is the first dawn and shewing forth of the Lord in the Spirit. His heavenly wisdom is shewn forth in the ease with which He entered the schools of the doctors, and astonished them by the depth and soundness of His questions and remarks; while in the words, "Wist ye not that I must be about My Father's business?" He manifested Himself to His mother, and to all around Him, as a Being separated from His earthly kindred, as having work to do in which they could not work with Him; as having a Father who was not Joseph; and whose work was not labour after the flesh, but the building up of truths and the turning of hearts. This was His first manifestation after a spiritual sense.

These appear to me to be remarks which arise plainly out of the portion of St. Luke's Gospel which has been chosen for this day's service. I will now, my brethren, endeavour, by the aid of God, to draw from my text some of its spiritual lessons.

Our Lord said unto Mary, "Wist ye not that I must be about My Father's business?" My brethren,

what is the business of Almighty God? His work it is, for even the Almighty God, like unto us His fallen children, giveth unto Himself everlasting work to do,—His work it is, ever, and without fail, without intermission, to do good to every created thing. This is the constant and the ever-living business of the all-powerful, the all-offended, but the all-pitying Father of us all. To do good, to pour out benevolence, to shed forth truth, to spread gracious calls, to point out the paths for peace on earth, and to lead us into the avenues of the gates of heaven, this is the little thought on, the ill-requited, but the unwearied work of the most pure, the most glorious, the most merciful Lord God, who reigneth in the heavens. This was the business which Christ began to do; and all the days He sojourned upon earth He continued to fulfil it^c. This was the great spiritual course in which He manifested Himself as the Son of the Most High God, as the Creator of the worlds. In works of charity, in feeding the hungry, in healing the sick, in recalling the dead, He shewed forth the merciful loving-kindness of the Godhead, the power of the Almighty.

But in works of the highest charity, in works of grace, His heavenly character shone forth in a still clearer light. Works of grace, pure grace! For His spiritual feeding of the hungry souls, His spiritual healing of the souls sick unto death, His spiritual

^c John v. 17.

replied to her in the remarkable words, "How is it that ye sought Me? Wist ye not that I must be about My Father's business?"

It is probable this history is taken for the service of this day because the circumstance here recorded is a fresh manifestation or shewing forth of Christ the Lord. The birth of Christ and the star in the east shewed forth the coming of the Lord in the flesh; this history is the first dawn and shewing forth of the Lord in the Spirit. His heavenly wisdom is shewn forth in the ease with which He entered the schools of the doctors, and astonished them by the depth and soundness of His questions and remarks; while in the words, "Wist ye that I must be about My Father's business?" He manifested Himself to His mother, and to all as having work to do in which they could not be separated from Him; as having a Father who was not with Him; as having a Father who was not and whose work was not labour after the building up of truths and the turning of the world. This was His first manifestation after His birth.

These appear to me plainly out of the passage has been chosen, my brethren, from my text.

calling back the souls "dead in trespasses and sins^d," were not only works of mere grace, works undeserved altogether on our parts, but were even contrary to all desert! Works of the purest love, of the purest grace! Often as He saw the pride, and heard, ringing in His ears, the contempt and the scorn of the mistaken Rabbi; often as He saw the extortions of the Publicans and unjust dealers; often as He met the abuse, the insults, and derision of the rabble, still shone forth in the bosom of Jesus Christ the manifestation of the character of God! He saw them as a father sees; He saw the sins of His children; He sorrowed over them, and He spared. He did that which only a father would do; He gave Himself meekly, willingly, and of aforethought, for His sinful and rebellious children; to appease, by the value of the Creator's Blood, the infinite justice of the Trinity in the Godhead! The Gospel in this day's service shews us the beginning of this spiritual manifestation of our Redeemer; and what I have added intimates the course, the end, and termination of it.

But is the shewing forth of Christ the Lord come then to an end for evermore? Is there no manifestation now of Christ upon earth? If there is not, great is our sinfulness, and most assured is our condemnation!

In one sense there is a universal manifestation of

^d Eph. ii. 1.

the Spirit of God in the earth. Every one, in one sense, is in himself as God, "knowing good and evil^e." This is the gift of our Creator. We might have been as the beasts that perish. But it is not so. Every one has a monitor, an adviser within him; every one has a check, a restraint from what is wrong, a prompting to what is good, and an applause when he has done good, a confidence, a cheering, and a comfort within him. These are the gifts of God, our Creator, and they are granted to every one,—gifts, in spite of our hardening our own hearts, kept alive in us for a long time. Even when by obstinate sin and determined opposition we have stifled the voice of this adviser, still does she often attempt to recover her government over us, often revives, and is heard again, and in every revival gives us another opportunity, another call to come back again to Christ's forgiveness, Christ's gracious aids and government. This, in one sense, is a shewing forth of the Spirit of God upon us all. Every movement towards what is good comes from the Father of all good, and is a merciful dealing of our Lord with us every one. It is another call, another entrance of the Spirit into the polluted heart, another trial whether we will receive the Holy Ghost. On the way in which we treat these sheddings forth of God's guiding Grace the very issue of our salvation or our ruin must depend.

So also, in another sense, is Christ the Lord manifested in the world. His holy Church is set up by Him, and has ever since the days of the apostles been maintained and supported by His Gracious care, even according to His promise. In His Church are His Gospels faithfully taught; and we are certain that while we preach Christ's Word we have also His authority given to us to preach it, and to uphold it; and, my brethren, I supplicate with my prayers to you, that you do beseech the Lord for us, that we never fail in this our duty to your souls, and to Him, the Lord Christ. But, then, what a gracious manifestation of the Lord this is in the world! What gifts these are to undeserving sinners! What a mercy that there is still reviving in the hard heart, and still struggling to lift up its righteous voice within our breasts, some portion of that blessed Spirit which God has abundantly shed forth upon mankind! What a mercy that this Spirit is the last thing to die in a sinful soul, and that, even when it seems dead, it is often awakened by the Lord to live again, again to exert its voice, and again to cry unto us by all the tones of persuasion, of shame, of terror, and of threatened condemnation! What a mercy, that constantly, throughout the land, the Church is, by the same Lord, upheld; wherein, again, the sinner is admonished, rebuked, and threatened, where the spirit that walks with God is cheered, comforted, encouraged; and though the garden in which we till and labour is rank, and overgrown with many

weeds and tares, is sore encumbered with the "thorns and thistles" which, when the earth fell, it was accursed to bear, nevertheless it is not entirely left of the Holy Spirit, for the "voice of the Lord God" is yet heard "walking in it'." My brethren, let no man say he is not called; he *is* called, if he will come in. To-day you have been called to come here into the house and the presence of Almighty God; the Lord moved your hearts to come and hear His Word; He gave you strength to come; He upheld you in the coming. These are not chance things, but they are among the calls of Jesus Christ, and they are constant calls. In this blessed land every one is called; the question only is, Will he come in? And with this thought, and the enquiries suggested by it, I will end this sermon.

The shewing forth, the manifestation of Christ the Lord, is still, in its spiritual sense, clear enough, is still abundant enough throughout the world; "The Lord hath visited" and still doth visit "His people^s." Do we accept this inestimable Gift? Do we follow after Christ? Do we place His Example before us, and strive to manifest to the world the Spirit of the Lord God in our hearts, and in our dealings one with the other?

My brethren, now, in the first days after the Epiphany, in the first days of the celebration of the manifestation of Christ the Redeemer in the flesh,

¹ Gen. iii. 8.

^s Luke i. 68.

ask yourselves, Whom do you shew forth in the flesh? If "out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh^h," so also "out of the abundance of the heart" the man acteth. Whom, then, do we shew forth? Do we make manifest Christ or Satan in the flesh? Whose empire in the world do we most labour to set up? whose government do we follow in the main? whom do we obey, and obey with pleasure? Are all these things with the Lord God, or with the enemy of God, and the enemy also of your own souls? And if the holy cause of Christ halteth, if the struggle is doubtful, if sinfulness is in much power amongst us, why are these things so? Is it because the Lord Jesus Christ is "wearied with iniquity," and hath withdrawn His light? Is that the cause of whatever darkness among Christians there may be? Is it because Christ is no longer manifested, is no longer shewn forth? Are these the "days in which there is no open visionⁱ?" Is that the strong reason why there is a darkness, as in Egypt, which we can feel, which we all do feel? Are these the reasons why many wander as in thick darkness? No, my brethren, not so. But because while there is a light we have covered it with the things of the world; while there is the "lighted candle," we have "hidden it under the bushel." God is not wanting, but man is not true; and therefore there come up the thick and high-piled clouds

^h Matt. xii. 34.

ⁱ 1 Sam. iii. 1.

of sin and error, and in many places wrap the world in the very darkness of the pit.

My brethren, let each ask himself, in fear, how often it is, when Satan approaches him with his temptation, when some habitual sin draws near, how often it is that then, firmly, and in prayer to Christ, and with a thankful obedience to His voice, how often it is that then he dashes the sweetened cup of poison from his lips, and drinks, in gratitude and with thanksgiving, of the pure water of life? How many are there who, when the tempter whispers and shews them his baits, take heed to the voice within, who listen to the remonstrance of the Spirit of Grace within the bosom, and obey? How many are there who turn upon the deceiver, and put aside his allurements? who, looking to their covenant and promise, looking to their duty to the Lord God, looking to His glory, looking to their duty to mankind, and to the spread of grace and peace upon earth; who, looking in fear to their own souls, refuse to obey the call of sin, and turn away from Satan and his solicitations, to follow humbly after Jesus Christ, and to walk in peace? When the enemy comes near us, which be they that say, "How is it that ye sought Me? wist ye not that I must be about My Father's business^k?"

My brethren, how many do in this way faithfully walk with Jesus Christ. For these verily are ques-

^k Luke ii. 49.

tions on which salvation hangs. And if it is the few only who be thus children of God, the few only, out of all that have promised at the font, if there are but "ten righteous¹" in the city, and if "the salt" that is upon "the earth" has scarce kept its savour, then surely many a man there is who must "believe and tremble^m." If these things are true, then tremble, my brethren, in truth. Often "the fear of God is the beginning of wisdomⁿ." For the sake of Christ who hanged on the tree for the redemption of our souls, for the sake of our endangered souls themselves, let not such tremendous truths be of no effect, passing by as the idle wind, which no man regardeth.

My brethren, make your religion a real business. Encompassed as we are by the temptations of the world, easily beguiled by our treacherous hearts, a religious life is the hardest task which is set before us, but the reward thereof is the greatest also. Look on it as a task, a labour, consider it as a hard race, and so act. Be determined, under God, to save your souls. Is there anything beyond plain sense in such a determination? Say, Christ to aid, 'I will not fall into everlasting burnings!' Leave not your souls to chance-reforms and maybe repentances. If, of His grace and mercy, Christ the Lord will make manifest His Spirit in your bosoms, be determined that you will make mani-

¹ Gen. xviii. 32.^m James ii. 19.ⁿ Prov. ix. 10.

fest your obedience, your thankfulness, and your love.

My brethren, we have the promise of God that if we will receive, He will grant. “Whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely^o ;” “Ho ! every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters^p.” Have, then, the spirit of prayer in your bosoms : but it must be sincere prayer ; the humble, the repentant, the heartfelt want of the strength and the guidance of the Lord.

Ask in this honest, humble, hopeful spirit, and the Holy Spirit will enter in and comfort your hearts, as long as you will be obedient ; will guide and sustain you, until your course here shall have ended ; and then for the sake of the Blood of Christ you will be accepted, and there will be joy among the angels of heaven.

These are thoughts which the Church of the Lord Jesus Christ hath laboured and hoped to plant in your bosoms, when she placed in your lips the collect for this day :—“O Lord, we beseech Thee mercifully to receive the prayers of Thy people which call upon Thee, and grant that they may both perceive and know what things they ought to do, and also may have grace and power faithfully to fulfil the same, through Jesus Christ our Lord.”

The Lord grant, my brethren, that you may utter

^o Rev. xxii. 17.

^p Isa. lv. 1.

many such honest and humble prayers from true and watchful hearts, and may God of His grace accept them in mercy, and bestow His blessed answers upon such petitions in all the rich abundance of His loving-kindness towards you.

SERMON IX.

Second Sunday after Epiphany.

ISAIAH liii. 10.

It pleased the Lord to bruise Him ; He hath put Him to grief : when Thou shalt make His soul an offering for sin, He shall see His seed, He shall prolong His days, and the pleasure of the Lord shall prosper in His hand.

THE fifty-third chapter of the Book of the Prophet Isaiah is a prophecy of the character of Christ's life. The feelings in the bosom of the Lord Jesus, His habits, His crucifixion, and the benefits also which would spring from His crucifixion, are all strongly foreshadowed in this remarkable chapter. It is a chapter so full of description, that it seems more like a history than a prophecy ; and it is so exact and minute, that it could hardly have been written with more accuracy and closeness if it had been composed after the death and the ascension of the Lord, instead of having been given forth to the world by the Spirit of the Lord God about 750 years before our Redeemer visited His creation. When we read in this chapter such exact foreshadowings, such close portraitures of the Lord Christ, our minds are ready to ask, " How can these

things be^a?" 'How can it be that all these statements, so exact in their truth, should have been foreseen and foretold so long before?' When we are told that, more than seven centuries before Christ appeared, He was foreseen "to be despised and rejected of men^b," and then look to the scorn of the Pharisees, the contempt of the Romans, the stonings and the crucifixion of the rabble; when we see that He was "a Man of sorrows and acquainted with grief," and then look upon His condition of want, His continual journeys, His nights of prayer, His forlorn and homeless state, without a place in all His creation where He could claim to lay His head; when we reflect upon that heaviest grief of all, the sins and the lost condition of mankind, the foul cause which brought Him forth from the throne of God to suffer as "an offering for sin^c," then we are tempted to ask, 'How could so plain a description of the Lord Jesus be given to the world so long before?'

So again, when we remember the fruits of His sacrifice of Himself; when we are told, in the words of the text, that after the Lord had offered up "His soul an offering for sin, He should see His seed, He should prolong His days, and the pleasure of the Lord should prosper in His Hand;" and, reading these words, then call to mind that the spread of the Christian faith, which, spiritually, is the seed of Christ the

^a John iii. 9.

^b Isa. liii. 3.

^c Ibid. 10.

Redeemer, that the “sons of God” and “the children of the Lord” have, since “the offering for sin,” been spread abroad upon the earth; when we remember how, since the crucifixion, the memory of Christ crucified hath grown and flourished upon the earth, how the world hath refused to forget her Redeemer, and hath kept alive in her bosom the Name of Him who saved her from hell; hath upheld His glory, and hath “prolonged His days;” how one hath said, “I am the Lord’s, and another hath called himself by the name of Jacob, that another hath subscribed with His hand unto the Lord, and sur-named himself by the name of Israel^d;” when we see that immediately after “the sacrifice for sin” the people straightway began to cleave unto the purchased forgiveness; that nation after nation heard the promise and the call; how they took into their thankful and obedient hearts the Gospel of Christ; how each enrolled themselves as the people of the Lord God; how they cast aside their idols, and, in great part, laid down their iniquities, laboured after amendment, prayed for grace, and strove to do “the pleasure of the Lord,”—then is the reader ready to wonder in his soul, and ask, ‘How can it be that all these things were so clearly spoken of so long before?’

My brethren, great would be the wonder, and far beyond explanation, if the fifty-third chapter of

^d Isa. xliv. 5.

Isaiah, or if the book of Isaiah itself, had been the chapter or the book of a man; but it is a part of the Book of God; and thus it is explained to our minds how it came to pass that it was written, and thereby our faith gains a vast comfort and support. Isaiah was the greatly favoured servant of the Lord: into his bosom descended a portion of the Spirit of God, and then "out of the abundance of the heart" the Prophet spake. This thought tells us how it was that the Prophet spake of Christ in so clear and so pure a tone; this thought tells us how it came to pass that Isaiah foreshadowed the Lord "as a sheep dumb before her shearers," as "a lamb brought to the slaughter^e;" how he described Him as "oppressed, and afflicted," "cut off out of the land of the living," yet "opening not His mouth." The wonder passeth away, and the truth cometh in the stead thereof, because Isaiah spake not but "as the Spirit gave him utterance^f." It was the Lord who, in the voice of the Prophet, spake of Himself, and in the splendid, the rich, and in the surpassing sweet descriptions of Isaiah's words, shewed us, in His great mercy, the beautiful picture of Himself; shewed us His patience and His suffering for us; shewed us His pureness; shewed us His love, and His untiring mercy; and seemed to strive in some sort to throw almost, as it were, a veil over His justice and His punishments. This thought tells us how it was that 750 years

^e Isa. liii. 7.

^f Acts ii. 4.

before Christ arose "the Sun of righteousness," how it was that a glorious dawn of prophecy ran on before Him, and shed out a promise over the benighted world of the wide, the pure, the all-sufficient light which was to spread forth upon mankind. But then, my brethren, this thought also bids us to take the Bible to our bosoms and to bind it there. It bids us cry, 'It is the Lord! it is the Lord!' It bids us say, 'Here alone, throughout the wide world, here is my peace, and my salvation; here alone, within these covers, purely of His love and of His mercy, abides the Lord God of heaven and earth, made manifest and shewed forth unto me!'

Such thoughts as these spring naturally up in our minds when we see such close and exact descriptions of the life, the character, and the death of the Lord Jesus so plainly foretold in the prophetic writings.

The words of my text require little or no explanation, "When thou shalt make His soul an offering for sin:" we understand at once that the crucifixion of the Redeemer is pointed out, and intended. By the words, "He shall see His seed," we understand as readily that the spread of Christianity should begin immediately after the death of Christ; which we know happened accordingly. By the words, "He shall prolong His days," we understand both that the Lord Jesus was to rise again, and that His Name and power should be extended through all coming

time. By the words, "the pleasure of the Lord shall prosper in His hand," we learn that the will of God should begin to have more power and to possess more influence over mankind than it had done heretofore.

These are the obvious and safe interpretations of that part of this prophecy which the Church orders us to read in the evening service of this day; they are also the parts of the chapter in which we have the most direct interest, and they may be considered by us as the crowning part of the chapter before us. For the other parts of this chapter describe indeed the character and the sacrifice of Jesus, but the text points out the spiritual benefits which that sacrifice and the spread of "the knowledge of the Lord" would in these latter days produce among mankind. This is the reason why I have made these words the subject of this sermon, and therefore, under the aid of the Lord, I will now endeavour to bring my text more directly before your notice. The first sentence of it is, "When Thou shalt make His soul an offering for sin, He shall see His seed." Christ, then, has been made an offering for sin. What, my brethren, does He see among us? Are we His seed? are we "the children of God?" We have been His adopted children in two ways: we have all been born in a Christian land, our life has begun in Christian habits, amongst Christian people; we have the Word of Christ constantly in our hands, and in our ears. This is one very great privilege. Then, in

a more especial manner, we have been His adopted children, because we have been baptized into His Church, we have been led on in our worship by His priesthood, we have received from them His Gospels and His Sacraments. These are very plain and very sure proofs of adoption in the Lord Jesus Christ. These are direct and open calls.

But, my brethren, a son after the flesh may rebel against his father, so also more readily may an adopted son. What, then, is our condition? This is always a most momentous question. "Many are called, few are chosen^h!" What in your consciences do you think is your state? "Called," no doubt, long ago called, openly, plainly, obviously called! But how is it further? "Chosen," or rejected? And if you think that your souls are in danger of rejection, where did the rejection begin? Did Jesus Christ begin it? were His good graces removed and denied without sin or offence of thine? did the conscience suddenly become cold, senseless, and dead? were you unable to see, and to feel when you were doing sin? did opportunities of grace cease, and leave you? were there no longer any churches, any sacred services? was the Word of the Lord silent in the land, and did Jesus, the Lord, leave the country with no one to admonish you, to lead you, to call you? Have any of these been the causes why the soul may seem within you to have been once indeed

^h Matt. xxii. 14.

called to be a child, but now a child departed from its Parent, and gone down the world in its iniquities and sins? None of these things, my brethren, have happened to you, but the chapter before us tells what happens to most of us: "All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way¹."

Wherever there is a doubt of your spiritual safety, (and with many a heart now too dead to think about spiritual safety or to enquire into its feelings, the case is of course the same,) wherever there is a well-grounded doubt of your salvation and your peace with God, you have left Christ. Christ has not departed from you; you have gone away. Christ has called, has numbered you in His flock, has essayed to lead you, and you have made answer, 'No, Lord, I must go astray now; I must take my own way; I cannot come.' This is universal, wherever there is a downfall from grace: and many downfalls any observing Christian may see and mourn for; in every downfall the soul is called to follow Christ, and makes answer, 'No.' Perhaps Sunday worship grows irksome, and Sunday pleasure is preferred; perhaps the drinking-house, or some game, mere idleness, or some loose companion is preferred; so the means of grace are cast aside, and the way of eternal damnation is followed; and then the soul feels that she stands in danger not to be chosen.

¹ Isa. liii. 6.

And whenever she looks towards God, and towards the grave, she feels that it was all her own work. She knows that she has received many a warning, many a reproof, many a recal; she knows this, and she knows also that she felt every reproof to be just, every warning to be wise, every recal to be gracious and undeserved; and feeling these things, she knows that she took the sin nevertheless, she followed Satan in his path, and, when God recalled His adopted child, she looked back upon her heavenly Father, and wounded the very peace of the Holy Spirit of Christ, and said unto Him, 'No!'

My brethren, how many are there who stand, as it were, among the flock, and are reckoned in our eyes as the seed of the Word, who are even now trembling, fearing, convicted, in any state but hopeful, neither trusting in Christ, nor feeling themselves still within their covenant with the Lord; the comforts, the supports, the benefits of Christianity unsought, untasted, undervalued, perhaps held in doubt.

My brethren, "it pleased the Lord to bruise Him." Why was this? Was it, that as grace abounded, we might sin in security? was it that we might obey the flesh, the world, and the devil, that we might break through our covenant, and still cry nevertheless, "We have a Saviour in Christ the Lord?" Is this the reason why He was bruised? No, surely; but that, by the mercy of God, we might serve Him in hope; that after a life of obedience, obedience always most earnestly attempted, always most anxiously

prayed for, most thankfully and gladly offered in the sight of God, we might have trust and hope; when we look back on our best deeds, and see the weakness, the shortness, the mistakes, too often the frailties and failings which have beset us, even in our best deeds, that nevertheless we might have a hope in Jesus Christ. This was the object; this is the mercy bestowed on a Christian; that when he sees in his ending days the long review of his poor life in Christ, when he is ready to tremble, and to say, 'The race is lost; there is nothing in my days but defeated attempts, imperfect services, omitted duties; many are my downfalls; few and poor are my labours and the fruits thereof; my hand is empty, and I have nothing wherewith to appease the justice of the Lord God of heaven,'—that then, looking to his prayers and his sincere endeavours as signs that he has an interest in that Sacrifice, and casting his eyes on the Cross, he might say, 'Lo, the all-sufficient Offering! In the mercy of Christ behold the redemption of my soul! Behold the value of that Sacrifice which is able to give a worth to my poor paltry course on earth! Behold how out of the inestimable Atonement of the Lord, my Redeemer, the many failings of my soul may find a pardon! a Saviour! a Saviour, in Christ the Lord!' This a sincere labourer in the vineyard is privileged, nay, is taught by Christ to say. But then in his heart is the seed of the Word. This was the reason in the mercy of God which brought from the bliss of

heaven and from the peace and throne of glory, above the worlds, the Son of God, the Creator of the worlds. He came that the Christian might have hope, even in his fears, and in the consciousness of his imperfections, that he might have hope and pardon. This was the purpose for which Christ suffered, that the true Christian might trust in Christ; but not he who rejects Christ, and resists His will.

My brethren, in addition to the world, and the fleshly lusts which war against the soul, there are many spiritual temptations in these days. We are sometimes bid to believe that once called, there is no fall; we are sometimes bid to suppose that there are some few elected and chosen, and that to them alone the path of heaven is set open. But the promise of the Gospel is more than this, and the mercy and the grace of God far wider than such teachers tell you: all are called; all are bidden. So also the threatenings of the Gospel are more than these teachers think or dream of: all may fall; the called may sin, and every sin is rebellion against God; and every rebel stands in danger of damnation. What, then, is the test? That to which I have pointed already, Do you sincerely strive to do the will of God? does "the pleasure of the Lord prosper^k" in your lives? That is the test by which to try your souls and to learn your spiritual condition.

^k Isa. liii. 10.

Because Christianity is indeed a religion which is to control the soul, therefore some people have imagined that strong inward persuasions, firm feelings and impressions, are proofs of the all-prevailing power of the Holy Ghost within their hearts, and have promised themselves that these transports are calls and elections, which can never afterwards be defeated; and these promises of self-election have led them to strain many texts of Scripture to favour this doctrine. However, such doctrines are unsound and unsafe. No doubt every strong and cheering persuasion that you are with Christ is at that time both an awakening and a call; but for that time only. You may oppose it, you may contradict it, you may cast it aside, you may turn it into a delusion. Many people do this; they who put their trust in such a call frequently do so, frequently exalt a sin on set purpose, frequently overrule the movements of the Holy Spirit. Therefore, my brethren, it is very possible that many of us now here have done so, and can prove by their own lives and experiences that it is very possible to fight against God and to banish grace, and know moreover that they have done so often.

Every sin we commit is, for the time, a full triumph of Satan over the grace and the will of God. Now every one of us is called, all of us are invited to walk in grace; all of us, to some extent or other, are in grace; indeed every call, the very fact that we are now here, in the sight and in the house of God, is in

itself a grace ! Nevertheless every one of us is also, to some extent or other, in sin ; and in sin which, to the outside of our power, must be vanquished, must be forsaken, must be forgiven if we be to be saved ; sin which, if there was no Redeemer, would destroy hope. This is the universal condition of the world. Therefore to suppose that because you have been called to be of the seed of Christ you are of course sure of the garner, is not at all a safe belief.

No doubt whenever calls are sent and grace is given—and this is, I believe, the case of every one—there a Christian perseverance will lead on to acceptance in Christ. But a Christian perseverance means a great deal. It means a strong and determined courage to follow wherever Christ leads, disregarding pains and exertions of the body, disregarding the sneers or derisions and oppositions offered to the spirit ; it means a constant watchfulness to avoid temptation, a constant prayer for strength ; it means the quickest self-charging, the most deep repentance for any failing of duty ; it means the most prompt and full reparation where any injury has been done. All this can only be obtained by the help of God, and the means to obtain help has just been mentioned,—constant prayer for strength. This is a Christian's life, and wherever it is sincerely followed, in trust in God, there graces, and fresh calls, and new supports, and succeeding victories, all will come in ; and this will be the course and the career of the soul till the end cometh, final acceptance in Christ,

and glory in the Lord, which are the promised fruit of this labouring together with God.

Finally, then, my brethren, Christ has been made an offering for sin; and He has seen His seed, He daily sees His seed, He sees mankind more and more widely called to the knowledge of His redemption, and to be His adopted children. When the Church ordered that this prophetic chapter should be read to you to-day, she meant that you should see that Christ's coming, Christ's death, Christ's character and graces to mankind, were all foretold by the Holy Ghost; she meant also that you should reflect that the fulfilment of all these prophecies should convince you of the truth of their origin in God. And next she meant that by this chapter you should try yourselves; that you should say, "Am I of the seed of Christ still? I have been; I was once; I was called; my soul was once tender; perhaps I was once living a pure life; I was just, I was full of prayer, I was full of hope; it may be that once I looked up to God with a warm and a confiding heart; at any rate, once I was called; I have been of the seed of Christ; what am I now?"

These are the plain questions with which the Church to-day would have you to humble your hearts and to search your spirits.

You are of the seed, but there is bad seed as well as good, there is barren as well as fruitful. The Church would have you ask yourselves which you are.

Christ's seed you are, and seed not wholly dead,

but many a man with a canker about his heart. My brethren, what I say is yet another call placed in the lips of Christ's appointed but unworthy minister; a call sent to you by His own especial ordination and rule; and therefore in conclusion I would say, "Search yourselves! search closely!" Then will I answer for you, you will pray; you will pray earnestly, and in fear; continue "instant in prayer"¹ and hope will come in, and comfort will grow, strength will be granted, and so obedience will flourish. The seed will live; there will be a harvest in your days, and for the sake of the "offering for sin," God will husband it in peace!

¹ Rom. xii. 12.

SEMINARY

THE SUNDAY SCHOOL

BOOKS IN USE.

It is not a year or two ago that the Church was in the midst of a great struggle. It was a struggle for the soul of the nation. It was a struggle for the soul of the world. It was a struggle for the soul of the universe.

THAT part of St. Paul's Epistle which the Church has read in the Communion Service to-day contains many things by which we are reminded to govern ourselves in the household with our neighbours and fellow creatures in general. They are rules which tend to make us holy, pure, humble, and obediently minded in our own persons, and therefore more "meek to be persuaded of the inheritance of the saints in light." As this is their character, and as the Church in her course of Sunday teaching, has deemed it right to bring them now especially before our notice, I will make them the subject of the present discourse.

"Be not wise in your own conceits," saith St. Paul. To many men these words are as much as to say, "Come out of yourselves altogether, change your-

selves entirely, alter your opinion of yourselves from beginning to end." Many men are so much given to rely on their own judgment, that they believe everything must be wrong which they cannot see to be right. They cannot suppose, self-love will not suffer them to suppose, that their own minds are too ignorant to enable them to judge on nice and difficult questions, but the more unlearned they are the more are they often given to think that they only can be right, and that every one who differs from them must be wrong. A man has reason to believe he is "wise in his own conceit" when he receives advice unwillingly; a humble and a wise man listens readily, he knows that goodness and wisdom may be sent to him, even through the mouth of the foolish, and he is glad to hear all that can be said on any matter which concerns him. But especially a man has reason to think that he is "wise in his own conceit" when he dislikes to be taught by those who are older or wiser than himself, when he sets up his opinion against those who are practised in their profession, and when he finds himself disputing on any subjects with those who have long made those subjects their own calling, their study and their practice, while he is well aware that he has never really studied it at all, or is so ignorant that he is not able to make it his study.

The Apostle's caution is not a sentence to be passed by lightly, for such people are by no means scarce,

and they are always very likely to be mischievous. No one, indeed, will deride his tailor, and so make his own clothes, nor will he dispute with his shoemaker or hatter, and then cover his own head or his feet himself, because he knows that he should be ill-clad, and would look strange and ridiculous in the eyes of all men. But in graver matters nothing is more common than to see conceit setting itself up boldly against knowledge, and bringing, in consequence, much confusion among men.

In worldly matters, indeed, self-conceit very soon becomes a valuable warning to other and wiser people. If a man who is ignorant of agriculture begins to cultivate, his losses soon bring him to sounder sense; if he is ignorant of trade and must needs speculate, then his bankruptcy soon renders him an example to others who would adventure like him in any trade of which they know nothing. In such practical matters self-conceit soon meets a downfall, and becomes a laughing-stock or a warning; but in questions which, though closely affecting the welfare of mankind, do not produce such immediate and manifest results, self-conceit will often produce much mischief and sin. In political questions we often see men very noisy and overbearing in their plans, who are, all the while, so ignorant that they cannot tell what events in the history of their country have befallen us, nor, of course, what ideas and plans led to those events; indeed many of them know so little, that they could

not tell the mere order in which our kings have reigned. So in religious questions we shall find people who not only will dispute, but also teach, who, being ignorant of the habits of eastern nations two thousand years ago or more, are often, for that reason, mistaken in their notions of texts; they rely entirely on translations, and cannot even read the language in which the Gospels of Christ were first written. Now men of this nature usually will not endure sound teaching, but mostly rush on into confusion and error.

There are many instances in the Bible, “written for our learning^b,” of men who were guilty of this sin, and who did much mischief in consequence. Indeed the fall of man was occasioned by it; God had positively declared to Adam that if he ate of “the tree of knowledge of good and evil he should surely die^c,” but Eve was “wise in her own conceit,” she took another teacher, and thought she knew better than her Maker what was for her happiness, and so she brought sin, misery and death on her own head and on her children for ever. So when David, in an evil hour, had determined to “number Israel and Judah^d,” that he might gratify his own pride and vanity by knowing the number of the people, and might make himself great in the eyes of others by shewing the amount of his power and the multitude over which he reigned, Joab, the cap-

^b Rom. xv. 4.^c Gen. ii. 17.^d 2 Sam. xxiv. 1.

tain of his host, wished him not to do this foolish and wicked thing. "Now the Lord thy God," said he, "add unto the people, how many soever they be, an hundred-fold, and that the eyes of my lord the king may see it; but why doth my lord the king delight in this thing^e?" David, however, was "wise in his own conceit;" he held the experience and friendship of Joab as nothing, he despised his counsel, numbered the people, and the death of seventy thousand of his subjects was the miserable consequence of his sinful vanity and self-will.

So when our blessed Lord foresaw the weakness and the falling aside of Peter, and told him expressly, "Verily I say unto thee, That this day, even in this night, before the cock crow twice thou shalt deny Me thrice^f," the Apostle, fully persuaded that he knew himself much better than his Saviour did, boldly answered, "Though all men should be offended because of Thee, yet will I never be offended^g," "if I should die with Thee, yet will I not deny Thee in anywise^h." Nevertheless, the consequence of this trust in himself was that, when charged with being "one of His disciplesⁱ," he declared with oaths and imprecations, "I know not the Man of whom ye speak^k." Thus was fulfilled the prophecy written of Christ, "and of My people there was none with Me^l."

^e 2 Sam. xxiv. 3.

^h Mark xiv. 31.

^f Mark xiv. 30.

ⁱ John xviii. 25.

^l Isa. lxiii. 3.

^g Matt. xxvi. 33.

^k Mark xiv. 71.

Peter, convinced of his sin as soon as he had committed it, “went out and wept bitterly^m.”

By these examples of the sad effects of being “wise in our own conceits,” in the instances of some of the best men mentioned in Scripture, we are taught in a very solemn way how necessary it is for us, weak, blind, and imperfect as we are, to guard against falling into the same dangerous error. We are taught to distrust ourselves, to entertain humble notions of our own judgment; not to put too much confidence in our own opinions, but to listen with patience to the advice and be guided by the counsels of those who are older, wiser, and better than ourselves. This, indeed, is what we ought all to do, but it is more particularly the duty, and at the same time the wisdom, of the young and the ignorant; they have seen but little of the world, they have very slight experience of the ways of mankind, and consequently are not able to judge, in numberless cases, how it may be best for them to act, or what course they ought to follow in order to be happy in themselves, to be esteemed by others, and to be useful to mankind. This, among other reasons, is one why children should attend to the advice and instructions of their parents. They are bound to do so, indeed, by the laws of God, who has so solemnly commanded them “to honour their father and mother,” to which is to be added the

^m Luke xxiii. 62.

example of Christ, who “was subjectⁿ” to the blessed Virgin and Joseph; and also the authority of St. Paul, who expressly writes, “Children, obey your parents in all things, for this is well pleasing unto the Lord^o.” But setting aside for the moment the commands of the Bible, children should shew this respect to their parents on two other accounts, because they have lived longer in the world, and therefore have more experience than themselves, and because no other persons can be so much their friends and well-wishers as those who have given them birth; they can have no motive for giving them advice but because they love them, nor can they wish them to do anything for any other reason than because they think it will turn to their happiness and advantage. If children, then, are “wise in their own conceits,” and neglect and despise the counsel of their parents, they not only sin grievously against God, they not only shew an utter want of gratitude and affection, but they also shew a foolish and wicked disregard to their best interests here and hereafter.

Upon the same principle it is that they who are ignorant and uninformed ought not to be “wise in their own conceits,” but, on the contrary, should be anxious to receive instruction, and to be directed in their conduct, by those who, from their wisdom, learning, or experience, are qualified either to teach, to advise, or to admonish them. I doubt not, my

ⁿ Luke ii. 51.

^o Col. iii. 20.

brethren, but you can call to mind many instances, either in your own case or in the case of others, where men have run into many dangers, committed many sins, or missed many advantages, because they turned a deaf ear to the counsels of prudent and experienced friends, whose greater knowledge, if attended to, would have kept them out of the evils into which they fell, or would have gained for them the benefits which they lost by being “wise in their own conceits.”

But more especially you must be sensible of the fatal consequences of being “wise in your own conceits” in opposition to the counsels and instructions of the ministers of religion; they are, as you know, the ambassadors of Jesus Christ, who preach His doctrines, and deliver His commands, “not in the words which man’s wisdom teacheth, but which the Holy Ghost teacheth^p.” They bring to you the wisdom from above, to guide your conduct to what is holy, just, and good; to shew you the path of peace here, and the road to happiness hereafter. Do not, then, my brethren, slight their message, or despise their advice, but, as St. Paul says, “know them who labour among you, and are over you in the Lord, and admonish you; and esteem them very highly in love for their work’s sake^q.” “For they watch for your souls, as they that must give account, that they may do it with joy, and not with

^p 1 Cor. ii. 13.

^q 1 Thess. v. 12, 13.

grief: for that is unprofitable for you^r.” “He therefore that despiseth, despiseth not man, but God, who hath also given unto us His Holy Spirit^s.”

Another excellent rule which St. Paul lays down in the Epistle for the day is this, “Recompense no man evil for evil.” In making the journey of life, we shall be subject at all times to the ill-usage of our fellow travellers; we must occasionally have to do with ill-humoured, or passionate, mischievous, or dishonest people, and must expect to suffer now and then from them, either in our feelings, character, or purse. All this is hard to be borne by flesh and blood, therefore is the command given us “be not conformed to this world^t ;” but if we wish to be Christians, and when we die to see God, we must bear wrongs without “recompensing evil for evil.” In case of any violent outrage against our persons or property, we are permitted, both by the Lord and by conscience, to fly for protection to those laws which are established under God’s authority to preserve peace and order in the world; but certainly with respect to all those slighter offences against us which are so apt to excite anger, bad language, or violent behaviour, it is both Christianlike and wise to pass them by without notice, and “rather give place unto wrath^u,” “for the wrath of man worketh not the righteousness of God^x.”

^r Heb. xiii. 17.

^s 1 Thess. iv. 8.

^t Rom. xii. 2.

^u Rom. xii. 19.

^x James i. 20.

Do you want an example, my brethren, of this forbearance under the undeserved ill-usage of your fellow creatures? "Consider Him that endured such contradiction of sinners against Himself, lest ye be wearied and faint in your minds^y." Do you wish for a pattern to follow when men "despitefully use you and persecute you^z?" do you wish for a glimpse of that reward which shall crown your patient endurance of evil? "look unto Jesus the Author and Finisher of our faith; who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God^a."

St. Paul goes on to direct Christians to "provide things honest in the sight of all men; and if it be possible, as much as in them lieth, to live peaceably with all men." There are many pious and worthy people in the world, my brethren, who, if they can satisfy their conscience, and do what they think is right, care little or nothing what other persons may think about them. But this is wrong; for though we should never make the desire of pleasing men the great motive of our actions, yet it is very right and very possible to fulfil all our Christian duties in such a manner as to preserve, at the same time, the esteem of mankind, while we are striving to secure the favour and the acceptance of God. Let it be remembered, also, that there is no man so poor and

^y Heb. xii. 3.

^z Matt. v. 44.

^a Heb. xii. 2.

humble, but he may be of benefit to others by his example ! if his behaviour be that which his religion enjoins, if he be pious, gentle, kind, and courteous, if he will shew forth what the Scripture calls “the beauty of holiness^b,” he will be setting an example so lovely in the eyes of all men, that all will respect, and many will admire and imitate it ; and this is to act in obedience to that command which the Church especially brings before our notice in her Communion Service, namely, that we “let our light so shine before men, that they may see our good works, and glorify our Father which is in heaven^c ;” whereas, if he be rough in his manners, gloomy in his disposition, careless whether he please or disgust those with whom he has to do, they will be likely to consider his bad carriage, which springs from his uncorrected nature alone, to arise from the religion which Christ has bestowed on us, and then they will feel less desire to embrace that faith earnestly and sincerely, which, from his example, they consider not likely to produce harmony, good-will, and comfort among mankind. Jesus Christ the Lord did not so practise it ; He was courteous and meek to all, He mixed kindly with the affairs of men, lived peaceably with all around Him, treated their infirmities with gentleness, and ever beheld their prejudices with tenderness and compassion. And His Apostle St. Paul, taking his Saviour as his ex-

^b Ps. xcvi. 9.

^c Matt. v. 16. First sentence in the Offertory.

ample, was, in every indifferent matter, "all things to all men, that he might by all means save some^d."

Lastly, as a certain step towards "living peaceably with all men," the Apostle enjoins all Christians to avoid every feeling of revenge. "Dearly beloved, avenge not yourselves, but rather give place unto wrath: for it is written, Vengeance is Mine; I will repay, saith the Lord. Therefore if thine enemy hunger, feed him; if he thirst, give him drink: for in so doing thou shalt heap coals of fire on his head. Be not overcome of evil, but overcome evil with good^e."

Remember, my brethren, that the passions in the human heart are the instruments of which Satan makes use, when he wishes to lead us into sin, and to ruin our souls; and of these passions none are so proper for his purpose as anger and the desire of revenge, which induces men to commit actions of the very deepest guilt. Against these, therefore, the Scriptures carefully guard us, by many most solemn and strict commands, by many plain and fearful threatenings of punishment. It is written in one place, "Thus saith the Lord; For three transgressions of Edom, and for four, I will not turn away the punishment thereof; because he did pursue his brother with the sword, and did cast off all pity, and his anger did tear perpetually, and he kept his wrath for ever^f." And again: "He that is angry with his

^d 1 Cor. ix. 22.

^e Rom. xii. 19—21.

^f Amos i. 11.

brother," saith the Lord, "without a cause, shall be in danger of the judgment; and he that saith to his brother, Thou fool, shall be in danger of hell fire^g." And when James and John, in the spirit of vengeance, wished to command fire to come down from heaven to consume the Samaritans, who would not receive the Lord Jesus into their village, Christ turned and rebuked them, and said, "Ye know not what manner of spirit ye are of, for the Son of Man is not come to destroy men's lives, but to save them^h." The religion of the Gospels of God wishes to lead us to a higher point of virtue than that of merely not being wrathful when we have been offended, or of not seeking to be revenged on those who have injured us, because it tells us to fill our enemies with shame and repentance, by "doing good to them which hate us, by praying for them which despitefully use us and persecute usⁱ." It will not be denied that it is a difficult thing to practise this Christian grace. Ever since the fall of Adam human nature has been far more ready to revenge than to forgive injuries; and the spirit of Cain, who rose up in passion against his brother and slew him, is but an instance of that great corruption which has descended to all the children of Adam throughout all the earth.

But, my brethren, we have not only numberless exhortations in the Word of God to fulfil this duty of forgiveness, but we have many examples to shew

^g Matt. v. 22.

^h Luke ix. 55, 56.

ⁱ Matt. v. 44.

us how it may be fulfilled, many examples to point out to us how it is to be performed. When Jesus the Redeemer was stretched upon the cross, and expiring in agony, He cried for pardon upon His enemies, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do^k." And when the first martyr, Stephen, was stoned for upholding the Word of God, he prayed in the moment of death for his persecutors and murderers, "Lord, lay not this sin to their charge^l." We cannot, indeed, hope to carry out this virtue as we ought, or any other virtue, by our own strength alone; for we "have no power of ourselves to help ourselves^m," in this or any other respect; but in the grace of the Lord Christ, we may find power even to return good for evil. The Lord God is ever ready to assist our weakness, if we offer up our humble prayers to Him for His grace and guidance.

The Church, through this week, gives us such a prayer:—"Almighty and everlasting God, mercifully look upon our infirmities, and in all our dangers and necessities stretch forth Thy right hand to help and defend us; through Jesus Christ our Lord."

^k Luke xxiii. 34.

^l Acts vii. 60.

^m Collect for second Sunday in Lent.

SERMON XI.

Fourth Sunday after Epiphany.

ISAIAH lviii. 9.

*Then shalt thou call, and the Lord shall answer; thou shalt cry,
and He shall say, Here I am.*

THE fifty-eighth chapter of the Book of Isaiah reproves that feeling of merit in formal worship which the Jews attached to their religious observances. This chapter shews us the Jews as fasting and praying, seeking God daily, enquiring after “the ordinances of justice, and approaching to God^a ;” but all this is described to us as mere form, outward show, empty worship. The Jews, however, thought that it was meritorious; they built up hopes on these observances and prayers, and entered into a sort of reckoning with the Lord; they made their complaints because God neglected them, left them uncomfortable, and without any blessing, while they were following Him in all these works of worship. They said unto the Lord, “Wherefore have we fasted, and Thou seest not? wherefore have we afflicted our souls, and Thou takest no knowledge^b ?” The Lord made

^a Isa. lviii. 2.

^b Ib. 3.

answer to them, Because your fasts and your prayers are not real fasts nor real prayers; it is form, not feeling; it is the outward body that bends and kneels, not the soul within. Is it a fast "to bow down the head like a bulrush, to spread sackcloth and ashes under you? wilt thou call this a fast and an acceptable day unto the Lord? Is not this the fast that I have chosen?" rather "to undo the heavy burdens, to let the oppressed go free, and that ye break every yoke? to deal thy bread to the hungry, and when thou seest the naked, that thou cover him?" Is not this a fast, and an observance acceptable to the Lord?

This is the purport of the chapter read by order of the Church this evening. In the end of it there is a promise; it is promised that if these works of piety, these charities, be done in sincere religion, that "then they shall call upon the Lord, and He shall answer; they shall cry, and He shall say, Here I am." As the Church has required her ministers to read this chapter to-day, I will further act in obedience to her by endeavouring, under God, to draw from it some of the instruction which it contains, and I hope I may place it before you in a plain manner.

It was not an unnatural mistake in the Jews, when they considered that the outward observance of the forms of their religion was sufficient to obtain the favour of God. The Jews were surrounded by heathen nations, and all the heathen worship was form

and ceremony. The heathens, by sacrifices to their false gods, by processions and games in honour of them, thought that they pacified them when they were angry, and expected to preserve their favour, and to receive blessings from them. It was rather, therefore, to be looked for that some part of this feeling might find its way into the religious service of the Jews. As the heathens thought that the imaginary wrath of their dumb gods was to be soothed by costly sacrifices, as they believed that a change from sinful habits was not required of them if a hundred cattle bled before their idol, so might their neighbours, the Jews, easily come to think that the sacrifices enjoined by Moses were enough to purge away sin, and that a change of heart was not absolutely necessary. They might think this also the more readily, because all their sacrifices and every one of their observances were ordered and appointed by the Lord Himself. They were not the observances and services which any skilful high-priest, any clever man of finer feelings, elegant tastes, and more just conceptions might imagine as agreeable, and might advance as suitable to the God whom he adored and believed in; but they were the very appointments and orders of the Lord Himself, and therefore they would necessarily be thought to be very sacred things, so that men might easily come to believe that in observing these services alone there must be some saving merit, though they produced no direct alteration in the heart.

This will seem the more likely if we remember what men are now: now, when we are so much more clearly taught in these matters, how many fall into this error, this snare? I call it a snare, because if Satan once gets us to trust, in any considerable degree, on outward observances alone, then a large portion of his work is done; for self-sufficiency begins to grow, and humility is stifled under it; a reckoning of offered services is told up, not a reckoning of backslidings; something like the "victory of my own right hand" is thought of, not the rescue of the Redeemer. 'Is it not enough?' we begin to say, not "Save me, Jesus, for I perish!" Much of Satan's work is done, if once he can get a Christian to rest contented with outward observances. Yet it is, in some degree, a feeling not uncommon. Sometimes, for instance, we feel a certain satisfaction, and silently praise ourselves, and think it is well, because we have been once or twice to church, and resting thereon, do not go forwards to ask what benefit we have drawn from the Lessons read there, from the prayers offered up, or from the sermon preached. Often we do not ask, 'Is my spirit more humble? in prayer am I more urgent? in good determinations am I more strong? in self-ruling am I more strict?' This, even in our spiritual worship, is very common, so that we may easily believe that it was more common in the formal and ceremonial worship of the Jews. Among Christian modes of worship the Roman Catholic is perhaps the most

formal, and has the most outward ceremonies, and we find the Roman Church attributing great actual value to these forms; so much, indeed, that she actually teaches that many of her followers heretofore, and I suppose now, have done, and are doing, more than is necessary for their own salvation; that they serve God more, honour God more, obey Him more than He has any right to demand! And this superabundance of goodness they believe forms a stock, out of which the Pope can draw, on certain considerations, the virtue laid up by one man, and bestow it on another who may feel himself in want of it! so that his reading of the text would seem to be ‘As the tree falls, so it need not be^c.’ Of course few errors can be more dangerous, few more absurd than this; but it seems to warn us how ready we may be to lean on forms.

The prophecy of Isaiah is almost as remarkable for the strong tone in which he insists upon spiritual feeling in religion, as for the clearness with which he describes Christ in His Person, in His Character, and in His Godhead. It seems as if the Prophet, sent to prophesy in an especial manner the coming Redeemer, had also been inspired both with a portion of His Spirit and with a knowledge of the teaching of the Lord Jesus, because we so constantly find him demanding from the Jews a return to the Lord, not in form only, but in

^c Eccles. xi. 3.

spirit also. He has been well called “the Evangelical Prophet,” because he foreshews the teaching as well as the sacrifice of the Son of God. However, when he called the Jews from a reliance on formal observances, we must suppose that he had but small success, because the Prophet Jeremiah, who followed him, still makes the same cry, and reproves the Jews for the same fault. Moreover, we find St. John the Baptist still urging against them the same blind confidence in formal worship; and lastly, Christ Himself rebuking them on the very same point, and often intimating that a great portion of the Jews had hardened themselves so long in this flattering error, and had nourished it so wilfully, that they were not to be recalled.

All this teaches us, then, my brethren, that to follow the Lord outwardly in our bodies, and to follow Satan inwardly in our souls, is a very possible thing, and may be a very prevailing error. It teaches us, moreover, that a religion with many forms may teach us first to reverence forms too highly, and then to build on them as on meritorious deeds.

Our religious worship has very few forms, and those very simple, and therefore we are not in any great danger of falling into the error of supposing that our observances alone can save us; nevertheless, I shall best follow out the Lesson read to us by the Church this day, if I ask how far in some points we follow the Lord Christ in spirit, or in the forms of the Church only.

Now the end of all worship is to adore and honour the Lord God, and, next, to amend and purify our own souls. This latter work is done with labour: we are impure in nature, and to be cleansed requires the Grace of God, and our own labour. It is, in the first place, of the Grace of God that we are awakened to desire pureness, unworldliness of spirit; if when we feel that desire we labour not with it, we “work” not “together with God^d ;” or, working at first, then tire, and flag, and give the work up, we are then where Satan would have us, “grieving the Spirit^e,” “in folding of the hands to sleep^f,” in heedlessness of the judgment to come. In this state Satan will allow us observances, and humour us in forms readily enough; because so he may satisfy an indolent soul, and lead her to think that she is serving God, and advancing towards heaven, while, unless the spirit is alive, and is making each form a means to an end only, and not the end itself, she is advancing nothing at all, but is as one walking in a dream, making empty gestures, and going through idle and ineffectual actions. Form is useful because it gives religion, as it were, a body, but it is not the soul of it; the soul thereof is “to worship God in spirit and in truth^g.” God will have forms, because He will have our poor frames of flesh and blood to bow down before Him, to adore and praise Him; much

^d 2 Cor. vi. 1.^e Eph. iv. 30.^f Prov. vi. 10.^g John iv. 24.

more than will He have our souls (which once were in His likeness, and even still are, in some sort, assimilated to better spirits,) to acknowledge Him, and cleave unto Him.

How, then, do we stand in this matter? When the forms of religion engage the body, does the spirit of religion enliven the soul? My brethren, we confess with the lips, what does the soul do? Does the sin she is fondest of then rise up in her recollection? In her confession does she point to that sin? draw down the eye of God upon it? tell all her loathsomeness, her deformity, and shame? Does she say, "This have I done, O Lord; and this, and this; willingly, vilely, dishonestly, uncleanly! O Lord, I am base here, I am untrue there: corrupt, corrupt is the fruit, because the heart's core of the tree is corrupt!" This, my brethren, it is to confess; to lay open all; to tell all; to tear away the cloak, and to shew the crookedness underneath. My brethren, is this done?

When the heathens made their formal worship, they appeased their idol, as they thought, by sacrificing to him things they loved,—their wealth, their cattle, their flocks, their fruits. The Jews sacrificed to God of their wealth also, and the things which they desired. What is our worship? is there a sacrifice of anything? If there is not, it is poorer than the heathen worship, and God is less acknowledged than a dumb idol. Is there a sacrifice of what the soul loves? My brethren, do we commonly

search the spirit to find out what is its darling sin, come with it here into the temple of God, confess it, lay it down in prayer for pardon, and leave it? Oftentimes the poor heathen parent came, in the thought that everything must be given up to his god, and cast down in flames on the altar of senseless Moloch even the innocent and infant child of his own bosom. My brethren, how many are there of us who have ever, in our soul's truth and in God's grace, cast down, not a child, but a favourite sin? Alas the downfall in the nature of man! seldom can a soul be urged to give up her disgrace, to sacrifice her stains, to cast down her dangers before the cross of Christ, and live. Once the Lord asked for the firstlings of the flocks, and the best of the herds on the altar of the temple, and they were brought unto Him; now He asks for the worst of the tempers of our hearts; now He says unto us, 'Bring before Me your indolence, your cold-heartedness, your covetousness, your lusts, your pride; bring them and lay them down, and depart away the richer for your sacrifice;' and "the servant knoweth his Lord's will," and saith, Yea, Lord, and straightway departeth away, and "doeth not according to His will^h." These things, my brethren, in this wide and greatly blessed land, are far too true of too many of us. But do they not say unto us, 'It is form, it is form, but where is the soul of religion?' Is it not to live in Satan's hands

^h Luke xii. 47.

after all? are we not amused by him? are we not allowed to talk of Christ, to look to Christ, to feel a sort of hope in Christ, but tempted not to sacrifice, for Christ's sake, one wrong feeling, or one sin? Tempted successfully, but why? because we hate the labour of following whither the grace of God would lead us, with a strict and determined struggle to keep the soul humble and clean, and to tread down sin. We can hope for the salvation, but cannot endure the burden, of the cross; we are ready to go up into the mountain, and to be glorified with Christ, but are not ready first to leave vanity and the world, to go out into the wilderness, to deny temptation, and to banish Satan.

Yet, my brethren, this must be done. Under our blessed Christian call, unless this is done,—God knoweth, but I believe and tremble,—unless this is done, I believe we fall far behind the very heathen in his blindness. He sacrificed what he thought was pleasing, and he imagined that he did right; but we keep back what we know God requires us to cast out, and keep it back to make our hearts worse.

At any rate, Christianity, to be a saving faith, is a religion of constant spiritual labour. Ever since the fall the earth hath been an emblem of the heart of man, both bring forth to us "thorns and thistles"¹ continually. When the husbandman looks upon his

¹ Gen. iii. 18.

field, he says, 'I must weed it again : ' let the Christian look upon his heart, and he may say, 'I must weed it again, I must weed it again.' Sin after sin will arise in it, and one sin rooted out, another will be springing. "In the sweat of our brow^k" we "eat the meat that perisheth," and we must work painfully in as continual a labour, if we would eat the "bread of life." The call is not, "Come unto Me, all," but, "Come unto Me all ye that labour, and are heavy laden¹;" and if we would examine ourselves by Christ's commandments, we shall all find "labour," and a "heavy burden;" and that so heavy, that were there not Christ for the labourer to turn unto, the work must be left undone, and the soul would perish. Where, then, is the soul, which not only labours not, but even enquires not, knows not her own state, nor the amount of her transgressions? where is that soul? She is bringing her empty forms up to the grave, and there they will avail her as the coffin does her body, they will carry her decently out of this world, but they are as mere dead wood and solemn finery, perishing in the tomb.

But what is the security that if we do add to our religious worship, spiritual labour, earnest self-searching, sincere work to deny sin,—what is our security that we shall have our reward in this constant and unworldly toil? The security is the word of the Lord Jesus Christ, the word of God in the Old and New

^k Gen. iii. 19.

¹ Matt. xi. 28.

Testament. In the Gospels the Lord hath promised to those that "labour together with Him," that He "will give them rest." In the Old Testament, not to leave the chapter ordered for this day, we shall find the same promise. When the Prophet had warned the Jews to add correction of the spirit to the forms of their worship, when he had urged them to live in justice, in mercy, and in purity, for the love of God, "Then," he adds, "shall thy light break forth like the morning, and thy health shall spring forth speedily: thy righteousness shall go before thee, and the glory of the Lord shall be thy rereward. Then shalt thou call, and the Lord shall answer; thou shalt cry, and He shall say, Here I am^m."

There, my brethren, is your security and your promise, the word of the Lord Jesus Christ. Let me beseech you not to cast it behind you. Put yourselves into earnest spiritual work; cherish the grace of God; labour to purify your hearts more and more. The time must come to all when we shall have done with the world, when our only last care will be to "cry unto the Lord:" and unless God shall make answer, hope departeth. This time must come. Let us have made preparation for it long before; long before let us have bent in earnest prayer; let us have laboured in true endeavours to subdue sin in our hearts, to trample it down, continually to crush its ever-rising head. This is our Gospel call, this is what is com-

^m Isa. lviii. 8, 9.

manded by our Redeemer: unless it is fulfilled, Christ has nowhere promised that He will redeem us. But fulfil it, my brethren, and immediately, according to the abundance of the Lord's mercy, He will fulfil His promise in a larger way than He has said He would. Do you fulfil the Gospel call; and long before you stand at the judgment-seat, you will begin to taste redemption: you begin to feel it here, while in the flesh; you feel more peace, more trust, more strength in Christian walking, more hope when you look towards Jesus Christ; you feel more sustained in prayer, more answered, more in assurance that you are not forgotten of the Lord. The prayer seems to go up on high, and a comfort, a warm reliance comes down to answer it. You "cry unto the Lord," and you feel the answer, "Here I am."

My brethren, cherish these feelings, take these blessings; cast out at Christ's word the "lets and hindrances;" cast out the sins, the things you are ashamed of, the things you are afraid of; cast them out, with God to aid, and advance into the reality, into the life, into the power, into the blessings of Christianity.

My brethren, when will you advance? Your preachers tell you till they almost weary in the telling, till you, perhaps, are almost weary in hearing, that now you must advance, "now is the accepted timeⁿ." 'Now' may be said of every time, of

ⁿ 2 Cor. vi. 2.

every Sabbath, of every week-day. Always the Lord cries, 'Now, now!' Satan ever whispers, 'To-morrow, to-morrow!' and this goes on many days, sometimes all the days of a man's life.

My brethren, test the reality of your religion in this manner,—there are many in every congregation who turn their backs upon the Table of the Lord. Do they mean to do this for ever? They depart, because a sense of sin or a fondness for this world makes them feel that they do not hold themselves worthy to "eat of that bread and to drink of that cup^o." Do they mean that this should continue? do they intend to die unworthy? If so, why do they come and sit beneath the priest of God at all? what are their praises and prayers profitable for, if they mean only to serve God in part, if they intend to have "the two masters^p?" is it not a mere empty form? But if the meaning is, one day to give up lightness and vanity, one day to lay down vice, and hereafter to follow Christ in truth, then how will this be better done than by devoting the time between this day and the next Holy Communion to an honest, bold, true examination of your own hearts, to an earnest repentance for sins committed, to fervent prayer for grace to guide you in future temptation? My brethren, if one day this is to be done, when can it be done better than now? where is the certainty that any other time will be granted in which it can be

^o 1 Cor. xi. 28.

^p Matt. vi. 24.

done at all? I would beseech you, for the sake of your eternal souls, to be touched with what I say: these calls of God's Church cannot be put aside without some sin.

My brethren, I do not call you; it is not I; but it is in the permission and the providence of God that His priest points out the way, prays you to renew your spirits, calls upon you to sacrifice your sin, and urges you to turn unto the Lord and to live in peace with Him. My brethren, you lose nothing but your shame and your danger, but you gain eternal peace with the Lord Jesus Christ. That peace will begin now if only you begin, my brethren. Is there a Christian who will say, 'I will not begin.' "O let your light break forth like the morning, and let your health spring forth speedily^a." Much time you may have laboured with your destroyer for your own destruction, turn now unto mercy and forgivenesses, and bring back, in humble and earnest prayer, a repentant heart. In this way, day by day, you would lay down sin, and gather into your bosoms peace and hope. Searching yourselves, you will know yourselves; knowing yourselves, you will tremble at your sins; trembling, you will fly to God through Jesus Christ. These are the courses which lead you to receive the grace of God effectually, and will put down sin.

Let this course begin; let this earnest, spiritual

^a Isa. lviii. 8.

labour arise out of your worship. If you will enter into this path, your feet will be guided; you will walk safely, till you will be led, in the most grateful spirit, —thankful that Christ has mercifully deigned to renew and to lead you,—you will be led to kneel down before the Table of the Lord, you will pour forth your contrite expressions, you will “cry unto the Lord” for the sake of His blessed Son “to forgive you all that is past,” and the Lord shall answer, “Here I am^r.”

So live, my brethren, that you may be able thus to meet God whenever you are bidden of Him. If, when that time comes, you feel that you are still not ready, that you are in wilful sin, and kept back, then charge yourselves bitterly, you have cast aside another call. Remember, religion, to be rewarded, must be a work, it must be a reality; the “vineyard” which you have to till is your own heart; you must come in out of “the market-place,” which is full of the vanities and traffic of the world, you must labour in your own heart, and cleanse it, else there is no reward promised of the Master.

^r Isa. lviii. 9.

SERMON XII.

Fifth Sunday after Epiphany.

ISAIAH lix. 11.

We look for judgment, but there is none ; for salvation, but it is far off from us.

THESE words, which are taken from the first Lesson appointed by the Church for this day, are part of a passage which informs us that the calamities, which befel the Jews, visited them on account of their sins.

Evil and calamity are very abundant in the world ; they are so abundant, that it has long since become a sort of proverb that “man is born unto trouble^a,” and that he who looks for peace and enjoyment on this side the grave may be sure of disappointment. This opinion is, no doubt, a truth ; perhaps a truth as certain as the only other truth which is certain, namely, that one day our evils will end in our death, and, it may be, will not end till death comes and cuts them short.

This abundance of evil in this life has given rise to a belief, which has prevailed always and through-

^a Job v. 7.

out the whole world, that there is both a great and good Spirit, the Creator and benevolent Father of the world; and also an evil spirit of great activity and power, whose business and joy it is to hurt and destroy this world as far as in him is, to mar and defeat its happiness, and to bring upon it evil of every kind. Moreover, wherever a revelation of another and an eternal life has been bestowed upon mankind, in those more enlightened nations this opinion is so strong that they believe, without exception, that this evil spirit labours, by sundry temptations, to draw mankind into divers sins and offences against the laws of the Lord God, so that their souls hereafter may, in the life to come, be eternally in pain, punishment, and anguish, and that evil and calamity may be continued to them for ever and ever.

Why this evil spirit should be permitted to exist, why he should be allowed by an all-powerful God to remain so long undestroyed, and apparently even unsubdued, has not been told us; therefore we are unable to explain the reason why evil is allowed to be busy in the world. But that the belief in the existence of an evil spirit is true does not require any laboured proof, because he is revealed to us in many parts of God's Holy Word. We are continually therein cautioned against his wiles and his power, and directed how to withstand him, namely, by a bold and determined resistance against his temptations, by great watchfulness over the move-

ments of our own hearts, and by constant, anxious, and earnest prayer to God always to be with us in His Holy Spirit, guiding us and counselling us unto all good. The chapter read by order of the Church this day tells us, however, one reason why calamity is allowed to visit us. It warns us that the Jews suffered evils of many kinds by reason of their sinfulness; and so we are taught that the evil spirit is often made, in the hands of Almighty God, an instrument of punishment to the wicked.

As this is a very material point in the doctrine contained in the Lesson of this day, I wish to make it the subject of this sermon.

This doctrine shews us the power of the Lord, as well as the justice of God also, in that He compels sin to chastise sin. David prays the Lord to deliver him "from the wicked, which is Thy sword^b," the instrument by which "He executeth judgment in the earth."

In the same way we see diseases follow loose or riotous modes of life, nor can we doubt but these also are ordained of God to be a punishment for sin, evil following evil deeds.

This doctrine is laid before us to-day by the mercy of Almighty God, guiding His Church by His Holy Spirit, according to the richness of His promise to her. In a world tried by many troubles and evils it is a doctrine of very great importance to us.

^b Ps. xvii. 13.

In the first place, if calamities and evils visit us on account of our sins, then every distress would seem to be a call upon us to enter on a strict and searching examination of our practices, and of our thoughts and wishes. The belief that evils are chastisements from God leads us to enquire "wherein we have offended;" we are brought at once to ask, 'What have I done, and wherefore am I visited?' My brethren, who can make this enquiry too often? who can say too soon, or too earnestly, 'What have I done? what have I wished and meditated? what have I attempted?' These enquiries, however, are very seldom set on foot, and when made, our questions are commonly very slightly put. This is quite contrary to the meaning of the Church of the Lord Jesus: it is also quite contrary to her discipline, if that discipline was exactly followed. The Church appoints a fast-day in every week, and that day is intended especially for this self-examination. It is then she meant that the soul, kept low by abstinence, should examine herself, should turn more especially on that day to the Word of God, and should compare herself more strictly with it. Ash-Wednesday and the season of Lent are times set apart for a public and general abstinence and humiliation, both on account of sin committed, and also as periods wherein to strengthen ourselves against sin. The weekly fasts appointed by the Church are usually slighted altogether; many, indeed, are ignorant that there are any such fast-days set forth. Lent, I need not add,

is a season so kept, as not to impress us with the belief that people do then strictly examine their lives or deeply repent of any sins which they may have discovered.

Still, my brethren, who will say that there ought not to be these seasons for self-examination, who will say that there ought not to be very deep repentance? Who will not rather say that in commanding a fast and a self-searching once a week, the Church has only been too gentle; and, that if she ordered such an exercise once a day, if every night we were happily compelled to look strictly into the wishes, words, and deeds of every day, who would say that the enquiry was made too often, or that our courses were too well guarded? who will say that such a custom would not bring in repentance as the last deed of every day? who will say that when darkness and the "perils and dangers of night" close around us, there would not be then many a soul much more fitted to "fall asleep in the Lord" than it is at present? Because it would have been more in prayer, more in humbleness and self-condemnation.

This, however, is not the only spiritual benefit which we should gain, if we received in full faith the doctrine that earthly evils are often chastisements for sin. We should gain also patience, because we should say, 'What do I deserve but chastisement?' Alas, my brethren, how often is chastisement but ill received! how often it worketh

impatience, murmuring, a rising of the heart against the will of God, instead of a repentance never to be repented of! My brethren, why is this, but that, though the rod is felt, the Hand that bears it is not seen? Say at once chastisement is for sin, and submission begins. The Church, in a world full of troubles, warns you of this to-day; and she desires you to say, 'Are my sorrows many and heavy? what, then, are my sins? are they few and light? does my course please the Lord God? does it please the meek, the pure Jesus? does it, when I look over it, please even myself? am I satisfied with it? can I, even I, with my flattering heart,—can I excuse it? Alas, alas! why should I ask for peace? is peace good for me? Peace and ease I may have enjoyed hitherto; have they kept me obedient? have they kept me thankful as I ought to have been? My brethren, your hearts begin to grow rich in true wisdom when these are the fruits of calamity, when such questionings freely spring up, and are entertained with truth. It is intended that grief should bear such fruit; they are fruits very rich, and very wholesome, and very much needed by every heart. Grief is a briery and twining plant, and compasseth us readily about, but she is sent of God, she is no weed, for she beareth that which is always likely to refresh, to strengthen, and to heal us. My brethren, turn not away from these thoughts, they are part of the teaching which Christ, in His mercy, hath ordered the Church to lay before us to-day.

Grief, my brethren, humbles the spirit, and this is another gracious help towards our pardon in the last judgment. "O man! thou worm," it is marvellous how proud thou art. Let any sinner differ from another sinner in anything which is thought to be a happy point, and straightway he is boastful thereon. Let a man be more rich, let him be more handsome, let him have some title or distinction, let him know better who are his forefathers, let him have some talent and accomplishment, let him be distinguished in any small matter which may influence the acquaintance in which he finds himself, and straightway pride begins to nestle in his heart. Seldom does that man think,—'This advantage is my trial; on this side lies my danger; my position, my ability, my wealth, my accomplishments, all are given me in order that I may thereby bring glory to the Lord God, and amendment of life among men. Seldom does he think,—'I am sent into this world to serve God to the uttermost, and this talent is to be turned to account; it is especially given to me rather than to another, that I may therewith work more effectually in the vineyard of Jesus Christ. Vain displays and empty triumphs, personal exaltation, and the applause of the people, are not the fruits that I should reap from any advantage or distinction I may possess; but I should zealously and fearfully watch that I may turn it to the advance of godliness. I should pray and watch my steps, so that I may make virtue look more lovely; and being in some point one who

may lead others, on that point especially should I take heed to lead them on to good. Seldom is any accomplishment, any position or advantage, viewed with this jealous, this fearful, this Christian examination. Mostly is admiration courted, respect challenged. My brethren, prayer should be solicited. How hard it is for the rich man, how hard for the distinguished or the noble, to look beyond the gilded and the silken state which surrounds them, beyond the sables and the plumes on the coffin, and to remember that when the grave closes over them, they are brethren to the pauper from the workhouse. The same they are in death, the same in decay, the same in resurrection, the same in judgment, the same in sentence. But not the same in the account to be rendered. They have received more, therefore of them more will be required. That which will be required more, is what I have pointed out, namely, that the talent, distinction, wealth, position, or advantages, whatsoever the difference may be, should have been turned, never to self-glorification, but always to the drawing others more and more into the service of God.

Christ the Lord, Christ the Judge of men, warns us that it is "hard for the rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven," and the reason is because man is proud. Thou art proud, O worm, and thou lovest to glorify thyself; thy thought is thine own advancement, and thine own enrichment, for some pitiful portion of thy three score years and ten;

and thy labour is not for that which ought to be its object, thine eternal pardon, and the glorification of thyself, and of them that are around thee, in the mercy of Christ Jesus, for ever and for ever. Therefore thou art busied in a wrong toil, and thy proper task is left undone; thou art not “working out thy salvation in fear and trembling^c.” My brethren, the doctrine which, under God’s merciful providence, is to-day laid before you in the appointed Lesson, corrects this empty pride, and takes away the danger of it. Believe that chastisement is sent on account of sin, and the proud man begins to be humble.

Grief, by God’s dispensation, enters every house in this world. The poor man must endure her, and the rich cannot bribe her to be absent. Her hated form will rise up by every fireside, and the Lord God sends her forth to chastise every household. We all feel her power; the poor man sheds his bitter tears with his tattered garment on his shoulders, and the rich man groans with his jewel on his bosom. Recollect that she comes on account of sin, and every soul alike is humbled into its proper place before God, down into the dust. The poet was inspired when he sung, “Sweet are the uses of adversity:” this is one of her “uses,” she makes us remember ourselves, and our doings; she makes us ask what our duties are, and what the fulfilment of them; the more exalted we are, the more she hum-

^c Philipp. ii. 12.

bles us, by reminding us that he that is set highest is in greatest danger of falling, and also that the fall is greater. Thus, while under God's merciful teaching we learn to look on grief as a sacred thing, chastisement humbles the heart, and brings in self-searching and confession of sin. But if sorrows visit us on account of sin, and if they are, in this view of them, part of the justice of the Lord overtaking us and correcting us in this life, so does grief come to us enriched also with some portion of the mercies of God.

Grief makes us more ready to leave this world. All have to depart, and "to be no more seen." Grief makes us more willing to go. "O death, how bitter is the remembrance of thee to a man that liveth at rest in his possessions, unto the man that hath nothing to vex him, and that hath prosperity in all things! O death, acceptable is thy sentence unto the needy, and unto him whose strength faileth, unto him who is vexed with all things, and to him that despaireth, and hath lost patience^d!" Here we learn that God is merciful when He corrects us with sorrows; He leads us by chastisement to see our sins, to repent, to purify our hearts; while the same punishment teaches us how short are the joys of life, how easily they are interrupted and broken, how tasteless they are when sorrow is present with us; and thus we are brought to the remembrance that this life is not a thing to covet, but

^d Eccclus. xli. 1, 2.

that the only real blessing which it can bring to every traveller in the journey, is the happy departure out of it! We may observe, also, how mercifully this right estimation of the vanity of this world is forced upon us, even in our pleasures themselves. A very thoughtful, a very religious, and a very wise man walked once through the abode of one of the richest noblemen of the land, and when he surveyed the different articles of taste, convenience and luxury, which were set forth on all sides of him, "These," said he, "are the things which make the death-bed of the rich man hard^e!" It is likely that they do make it harder than the death-bed of the poor, but far harder still would it be if these pleasures, luxuries, and elegancies were as much valued by the owner as they are admired by the visitor. Used to the enjoyment of them, palled by gratification, familiar with their beauty, to the possessor daily they cease, more and more, to be a delight; daily they descend, more and more, into the character of mere necessary comforts. They are no longer charms against sorrows, they are neither supports nor palliations; but grief enters and walks amidst them, with her dart as keen as ever; and the rich owner, possibly more refined, only feels her stab with a more excruciating agony, and tastes the bitterness of her cup with a more acute disgust. So true, my brethren, it is that all that comes from the hand of God is "very good" for us.

^e Dr. Johnson's remark when he visited Chatsworth.

Chastisements, while they correct us, amend us also ; besides amending what is amiss in us, they give us, moreover, more just estimations of this world ; and visiting us who cannot abide here long, make us more prepared when the summons calls us to depart, both more fitted and more inclined to go.

But though it is true, and also a very wholesome mercy to us, that chastisements do follow our sins, and though we are never better employed, when in affliction, than when we are searching our hearts and our lives, in order to see wherein we have offended, nevertheless we are always wrong when we endeavour to account for any of the griefs and trials of our neighbours and acquaintances by remembering their failings, and by affirming that God's visitations are judgments sent on them because of their backslidings. There can be no doubt but the sins of all mankind will, in some manner, as it may seem good to God, be visited and punished ; but this is no matter for us to decide upon. Punishment, of whatever kind, is between God and the sinner. If we are in unrepented sin, we shall suffer punishment ; if we go on in unforsaken sin, we are falling into it, and shall have to endure it : this is all we know concerning it, and it is all we are concerned to know. When we see calamity and sorrows visiting another, we should tremble ; we see the hand of the Lord. God has smitten down another, one who is, it may be, no worse than ourselves ; in his sufferings we have received a warning.

Remember that all sorrow is God's visitation ; it

is a sacred thing : the troubled spirit is either under trial, or under punishment ; pray, therefore, for the sufferer, and search yourselves. My brethren, humble yourselves always. What are we ? what are our pomps and vanities ? what our little distinctions and advantages ? what is our continuance and stay ? where be our abiding-places ? above all, what are our sins and offences, that we should not be humbled even to the dust ? My brethren, where is the best man, where is the greatest, that ought not to reckon himself as insignificance itself in the sight of God ? who is there who would not be insignificance in the sight of God, if he were not regarded and kept in recollection by the mercy of the Lord, even in despite of his sins ? Let us, therefore, be humble, and never more humble than when we see the Lord dealing, by His afflictions and sorrows, either with ourselves, or with those round about us.

My brethren, these, I doubt not, are some of the thoughts which the Church of the Lord Jesus, guided by His Holy Spirit, would have arise in your hearts out of the Lesson which she has ordered to-day. Take them, and keep them. Above all, thank God that He has called you into His especial fold, wherein these Lessons are given us, and therein bow down your hearts, and follow in obedience and thanksgiving always.

SERMON XIII.

Sixth Sunday after Epiphany.

1 JOHN iii. 7.

Little children, let no man deceive you : he that doeth righteousness is righteous.

THESE words are found in that portion of Scripture which the Church has appointed to be read in the Epistle in the Communion Service of this day.

The Word of God tells us that for the sake of Christ's sacrifice and atonement on the Cross, there is salvation for every righteous man. The words ordered to be read to-day, and which, therefore, I have taken for my text, tell us what a righteous man is,—one who does righteousness; and it is in consequence of such texts, as well as in obedience to common sense, that all full and true preachers of God's Word cease not to press upon their congregations the great, and indeed the difficult, duty of good works. They urge upon them obedience to God's commandments, good living, followed out in faith, as the course absolutely necessary to salvation.

However, there are persons with less knowledge than zeal, and sometimes with less charity than

either, who are not afraid to thwart the ministry of Christ's servants, and if they might, to "make their word return unto them empty," by bringing against them the condemning charge, that in this teaching they do not preach the Gospel.

Now that it may be so in some few cases, I am not about to deny, because sermons are not, like our other fixed and written services, "rooted and founded" in Scripture beforehand, once and for all, and so not to be put asunder from it again: and in so large a body of men as the priesthood of Christ's Holy Catholic Church in this kingdom doubtless some will be found less taught, less thoughtful, less careful than the great body of the clergy, and therefore what teaching may proceed from these must have less spirituality about it, and may fall short of the Gospel teaching, either in amount or in truth. This is unavoidable, because of the frailty which is in all mankind; and it is one very powerful reason why we should value sermons less than all our other services.

Nevertheless the accusation that the Gospel is not preached by the priesthood of the English Church in Christ Jesus, is, for vastly the most part, without any foundation at all; and such a sentence is altogether unjustifiable when it is pronounced on such a ground as this,—namely, that not contenting ourselves with teaching doctrine, we dwell also on the duties of Christians; in other words, that we preach the necessity of good works,—that is, righteousness,

—as well as the necessity of a sound faith. Now as you may possibly hear this rash and sweeping condemnation fearlessly pronounced against your ministers, and may perhaps be troubled by it in mind,—for we all know how easy it is to stir up painful doubts and misgivings, under the pretence of great concern for God's honour and for the welfare of the souls of men: moreover, as you may not clearly understand how far faith, and how far "righteousness," are severally to be considered as actually leading us to salvation in Jesus,—let me endeavour, under God's blessing and aid, to make these questions as clear to your minds as they ought to be.

First, then, let us ask, What is faith? and instead of resting at once upon the Apostle's definition of it, that it is, namely, "the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen^a," let us consider how it looks under the still clearer light of practice, by turning to the Book of Genesis, and reading the single history of the "father of the faithful." For beyond all doubt this history is recorded for the very purpose that they who seek their safety in the spirit of faith, and who therefore are deeply interested in understanding the meaning of the word, may behold it in this history plainly and distinctly set forth, and may be able to feel and say, "This is saving faith." Taking the life of Abraham as our foundation, and adding to it also other Scriptures, whether they be

^a Heb. xi. 1.

of history, or doctrine, or commandment, we shall come to the same conclusion, that faith is entire confidence in the truth and importance of spiritual things.

The Patriarch's history, as it concerns the present question, stands thus:—In his old age, and against the course of nature, in the old age of Sarah, his wife, God promised him a son; and Abraham, it is written, “staggered not at the promise through unbelief^b;” but was persuaded at once of its truth and value.

In a few years his trust was a second time put to the proof. He was commanded to slay this son, “his only son Isaac,” in whose seed all the nations of the earth were to be blessed. Now though this commandment appeared to the natural eye of the parent to run directly contrary to all the previous promises of God, nevertheless again Abraham “staggered not.” We may suppose that this fearful and trying command may have given rise in Abraham's mind, as he set forth on his grievous journey with the lad to Mount Moriah, to such thoughts as these, ‘How can God's promises be fulfilled,’ he would say, ‘if I slay this child in sacrifice? The whole earth is to be blessed through his seed;—how shall this be if I now cut it short? Am I not opposing God, if I do this? am I not falling into a fearful sin if I do it? Is it God's word indeed, or am I not beguiled in this

^b Rom. iv. 20.

matter?" These would be some of the questions which piety and fatherly love would join to put into his heart. But still his heart made answer, 'It *is* God's word! It comes through the same channel in which came the promises of God: the same angels, the same ministers which God appointed to bear me His word before, have now brought me this, and who am I, to set myself up against God? It *is* God's word, though I understand it not; therefore I must obey. Now must I overrule mine own former reading of God's promises to me. Now, as a father dearly cleaving to his only child,—now must I overrule my own fond heart. All that is before me is to take God's commands in hand, and to obey.' So that thus seeing God with the eye of faith, knowing that with the Lord "all things are possible^c," that "our ways are not His ways^d," his trust in God did not fail him. Upon the mountain of Moriah he lifted up his hand against this beloved child to have slain him, if the angel of the Lord had not withholden him. Long before this he had been bidden to depart from his own kindred, and his father's house, and everything he loved; and "he went forth not knowing whither he went^e," without a murmur, knowing that God had foreseen, and had provided what was fit for him.

Here, then, was faith, and by it was Abraham justified. This undoubting obedience, this reliance

^c Matt. xix. 26.^d Isa. lv. 8.^e Heb. xi. 8.

on God, this unhesitating acknowledgment of His power, His wisdom, and His goodness, was so acceptable to the Lord, that "it was accounted to him for righteousness;" or, to use another scriptural word signifying the same thing, he was "justified" by faith. So, the Gospel affirms, must we also be justified by faith, if we be justified at all.

But I am fully aware that to say as much as this is not to set the question at rest: for a man objects at once, and not without some show of reason also, that it is "by Christ Jesus alone that we are made righteous before God; and if we are justified by Christ alone, how are we justified by faith also?" The answer is this:—the words 'by faith' ought to be changed into 'through faith,' or 'by means of faith,' as they well know who understand the tongue in which the Gospels were first written, and then the perplexity will be at an end; for the declaration of the Gospels will then be, "we are justified by Christ, through"—or by means of—"faith;" that is, faith brings us to the Saviour. It is the road, the gate, the channel to Him; and none can come to Him for any effectual purpose, save only through it. Through faith Abraham's heart was knit unto God, and he became obedient.

Nothing, I think, can be plainer than that without such a belief in spiritual things as impresses upon us at once the truth and reality, both of the mercies and the strictnesses, the blessings and cursings of the Lord, all these invitations or warnings will be with-

out power in the midst of the enticements of a world full of seducing temptations constantly present with us, and with treacherous hearts in our bosoms. But now if faith be all this, no wonder it has such excellent things spoken of it in the Bible; no wonder God's ministers, "in season and out of season"^f exhort their congregations to hold fast faith, for it is "faith which worketh by love"^g that bringeth forth in us the fruit of good works.

And now, I think also, it will not be difficult to understand at once, and to state with clearness enough, what is meant by works when works are spoken of as distinct from faith, as they often are by your spiritual teachers.

Now if a man were to rest his trust of salvation upon his good works, this self-confidence would bring him within the "covenant of works;" then, I suppose, he must look for everlasting happiness, and the dwelling in the glory of God for ever and ever, as the wages, the recompense, the reward for which he had laboured through life, and which he had earned by his well-doing, and not as earned for him by the Blood of the Lord Jesus Christ, his Maker and his Redeemer. Such a man must be content, of course, to fall by his own actual deservings. If any man holds the doctrine of the sufficiency of good works, taken entirely by themselves, this is, as I suppose, his condition.

^f 2 Tim. iv. 2.

^g Gal. v. 6.

Let him, then, look to the Old Testament, and there he shall see this very covenant, and, which will give him more teaching also, he will there see as well the condition of the people who were under this covenant of works. What, then, were the terms of it? Truly these:—in it were declared, “line upon line, and precept upon precept,” the duties they were to fulfil, many in number, and strict indeed in substance: and afterwards followed a declaration, which, except in very confident minds, was enough to crush every hope of acceptance from any such covenant, and which would drive all thoughtful persons to seek for peace with God through some other means. This declaration runs in these words,—“Cursed,” it says, “Cursed is every one that continueth not in all the things that are written in the book of the Law to do them^h.” Now, my brethren, with all our frailties and corruptions of the flesh about us, who can continue in all these things?

But the reasonings of the apostles plainly shew us that this law, and this covenant and curse, are not things concerning the children of Israel only: not so; but they are our warnings and ensamples, warning us Christians also with a common voice, “yea, and that a mighty voice,” that by the works of the law, that is, by an unsinning obedience and an exact performance of all the commandments of God, “shall no man living be justified,” whether he be

^h Gal. iii. 10; comp. Deut. xxvii. 26.

Jew or Gentile, bond or free ; and for this, the simplest of all reasons, because he cannot keep strictly and fully the terms of the covenant.

Accordingly, in the Jewish Church, by the mercy of the Lord, numerous sacrifices and sin-offerings were ordained, which were indeed types and foreshadowings of the coming Redeemer, whose sacrifice was offered once for all men ; yet, these sacrifices of the law were also, in those days, accepted by the loving-kindness of the Lord, in the stead of the sacred offering which they foreshadowed, and were taken as atonements for the insufficient performance of the law. But, since our Saviour's sacrifice of Himself, these offerings are now useless, they have therefore ceased to be offered, so that our imperfect works must now stand without these legal propitiations, and so far inevitably exposed to the punishment appointed for their shortness and deficiencies. We can appeal for mercy only through faith in Christ, and in His sacrifice of Himself : if faith is absent, if the Lord Jesus Christ is to be left unappealed to, we must expect only justice. The only well-grounded hope, therefore, of pardon after death must be through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. Faith itself being not indeed the fulfilment of any required duty, neither a perfect obedience to any delivered commandment, but rather, as I have said, a readiness, a preparedness to obey to the utmost, from a firmly-settled inward belief, as before stated, in the truth and the importance of all spiritual things. And thus, while the covenant of works

says unto him who is living under it, ‘Thou art lost, if thou doest not all things that are written in the book of the Law, without flaw or exception;’ the covenant of a living faith,—which is the only saving faith,—the covenant of a living faith saith rather to its servant, ‘Forasmuch as in thine heart thou doest well; forasmuch as thou wouldst perform every particle, if indeed thou couldst; forasmuch as thou doest fervently and honestly as much as thou canst in obedience to God, therefore Christ is sacrificed for thee, and for thee is prepared the pardon of the Lord. If thou do thus walk in the light, thou hast fellowship with the saints of God, and the Blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanseth thee from all sin¹.’ Now, then, where lieth the difference as far as concerns ourselves? Truly in this point, that while the covenant of works quenches all sound hope, the covenant of faith gives us a very blessed trust in the mercy of God. A difference how mighty, and how full of comfort!

Well, then, may we give utterance to a full heart in the words of St. Peter, “Lord, to whom shall we go? Thou hast the words of eternal life^k.” Christ sealed this newer and only saving covenant with His own Blood, nailing to the Cross the “handwriting of broken ordinances,” and the denunciations of punishment thereupon, which were “against every soul of man,” that henceforth such as were really prepared to do the will of God revealed through Christ, that

¹ 1 John i. 7.

^k John vi. 68.

is, such as have faith, should be "delivered from the wrath to come," even though their obedience, through common frailty, not through an indulged love of sin, be very imperfect.

Thus have we seen, I hope, how vitally necessary it is to the safety of souls that faith be constantly, earnestly, and affectionately preached; and I pray God, in His mercy, to preserve His priesthood from the sin of ever keeping back the name or the knowledge of it from their people.

But now I may be reminded that the duty of preaching good works as the necessary fruits of faith, is the matter indicated by the text read to us this day, and the matter also which, at the outset of this sermon, I proposed to establish; and so indeed it was: therefore, with God's blessing, I will now endeavour, while I end this discourse, to shew how this important duty presses upon us.

Let us remember, then, what faith is—an inward belief, namely, in the truth and the importance of spiritual things.

Now if this is the case, surely then such a faith must learn what it has to do, if it is to work effectually. The mere belief of a God, the trust in His mercy, power, wisdom, justice, of any or of all His attributes, never yet instructed man in the proper methods of worshipping or of obeying Him.

Let us look at the case under the light of a very familiar example. A child has just such a faith towards his father, such a belief in the truth and the im-

portance of the relationship which unites them. But he cannot discover what are the duties which he is to observe and keep, in testimony of this faith, unless some one teaches him. Accordingly he is told, ‘Do this ;’ ‘Leave that undone ;’ and just so does God our Father teach us by His only Son the Lord Jesus : ‘Do not steal, do not commit adultery, do not covet, slander not ; be not violent, neither malicious ; swear not ; keep My Sabbaths, read My Word, honour all men, pray without ceasing, love your enemies, love not the world.’ These, let us bear in mind, are His own instructions, written in His own Book of saving knowledge, and left by Him as saving commands for the guidance of His flock and the whole world.

St. James seems clearly convinced of the danger lest a barren faith might be the ruin of professed Christians ; a danger arising from the wiles of Satan, and the disposition of our own hearts towards worldly indulgences and sin ; therefore he describes, with much strictness, both its existence and its worthlessness. “Faith without works,” says he, “is dead¹.” Now, then, this dead faith being very common in the world, how shall the ministers of the Lord Christ, in preaching His Word, which is the sum and substance of their office, how shall they “go beyond the Word of the Lord, to do more or to do less?” Can we, or dare we, withhold His own solemn commandments, and those given expressly to bear upon one branch

¹ James ii. 17, 26.

of the duties which He has appointed,—our duty, namely, to our neighbours? If we do this, and do it as being the right course to take, then I cannot see how we escape from the charge that we consider ourselves wiser to save souls and to serve God than is Christ the Lord Himself. For we have, I feel convinced, clearly seen that it is the wildest and idlest thing to affirm, as many do, that faith being now once grafted into the heart, its proper fruits will follow, whether they be known or not known, and accordingly, that we need trouble ourselves but about faith. Surely, my brethren, all parties will allow that actual knowledge is more powerful than belief, and more likely to govern our conduct; yet those cursed angels, whom St. Jude describes as “bound in everlasting chains and darkness until the judgment of the last day^m,” those fallen spirits were once in a state of actual knowledge of the Most High, yet were they not thereby rendered obedient. So are they stated now to “believe and tremble,” but not “to obeyⁿ.”

But if obedience necessarily follows faith, and if instruction therefore is needless, then there is another thing which also follows as a matter of course, which is this, that about half the Scriptures are of no use, for at least one half of God’s Word is employed in telling us not what we must believe, but what we must do, to inherit eternal life; all which, according

^m Jude, ver. 6.

ⁿ James ii. 19.

to this notion, faith could have told us of itself. But no: the Lord God knew that faith had not in this sense "the gift of prophecy;" wherefore He has noted down our duties, each "in his own order;" and the commandments which God has given to His people, we must not keep covered, even if they would give unto us our "houses full of silver and gold."

One thing may still be said, that it is enough to preach faith, because faith will send us to the Bible, each man for himself, there to learn our Christian duties without being told them in sermons. Now we hope and pray for you, my brethren, that faith may send you to the Bible; we desire nothing better, provided that being sent, you do there also abide and fulfil in deed what you learn therein. Yet we must not forget that there are many who through want of learning can only hear the Bible through the ministration of the Church, so that if we held our peace, it would be to them as a sealed book or a covered fountain. Again, how large a portion of the busy and hard-working classes owe their Scripture knowledge almost entirely to the "priest's lips keeping knowledge^o;" how ready multitudes would be to grasp, with sanguine hopes, at the promises of the Bible, and, in the same spirit, to disregard its strictness? How many would cry out affectionately and willingly, "Lord, Lord^p," but would entirely neglect to pluck out the right eye, or to cut off the right

^o Malachi ii. 7.

^p Luke vi. 46.

and for Him, unless their home reading was guided, corrected, and quickened by the searching exhortations of the Church?

And now let none say of us that we are either detractors, or encouragers of boasting in our brethren, when we affirm that good works, where they can be seen, must go before salvation. We are quite sure that righteous living alone does not earn our redemption, neither could it were it ten thousand times more perfect than it even is. Redemption has already been purchased for us by the precious blood-shedding on the Cross. But do we not see, is it not a plain truth, that the things which cannot save may, in some sense, nevertheless be conditions necessary for salvation? I would repeat, then, for better safety against misapprehension, and I trust I may never cease to maintain, that our good works cannot of themselves deliver us from the wrath to come. But when I also repeat, and, as a humble minister of the Lord Christ, I would engrave it on your minds, that Christ will have them, Christ demands them; demands them as a proof of our thankfulness for His unspeakable loving-kindness, as a proof of the power of His grace; demands them as an honourable tribute to Him to whom all glory is due, as a "light shining before men," that they may be brought, together with ourselves, unto its great and glorious destination; demands them as a triumph over the cruel power of sin, as being that channel through which it is His pleasure to be benevolent to His

creation; demands them as being our labour towards the amending and perfecting our own fallen nature, and rendering it more like to the angels, with whom we pray that we may be admitted to dwell.

Good living, therefore, must be kept, carefully kept; and that it may be kept, it must be carefully preached until these words be blotted out from Scripture, "Not every one that saith unto Me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of My Father which is in heaven^q." And here the question may fairly and securely rest,—Are good works commanded? If they are, they must be practised; but how shall they be practised, unless also they be taught? My brethren, may God grant that we may thirst for, and quench our thirst, in all the fountains of the Bible, in all the well-springs of life equally, not in one alone. May no craft or "subtlety of the devil or man" ever prevent your ministers from teaching boldly, or yourselves from receiving humbly, the truth that faith must have her perfect work. For such indeed must be the mind of us all if we hope ever to see the heavens opened to us, and Jesus sitting at the right hand of God; if we look to be ushered into that glorious Presence with that blessed salutation, "Well done, good and faithful servant: enter thou into the joy of your Lord^r."

^q Matt. vii. 21.

^r Ib. xxv. 21.

SERMON XIV.

Septuagesima Sunday.

GENESIS ii. 3.

*God blessed the seventh day, and sanctified it ; because that in it
He had rested from all His work.*

THIS verse is taken from the first Lesson of the Evening Service of this day. It shews us that the Lord sanctified the Sabbath from the very beginning. Some people, hastily reading their Bible, have thought that the Sabbath was first hallowed when the Jews received the Ten Commandments on the tables of stone ; but this verse shews us that the Sabbath was a holy-day long before the time of Moses. It tells us that the very first seventh day, that rose upon the new creation, was sanctified, was set apart, was hallowed by the Lord ; and that to keep the Sabbath was an ordinance made by God as soon as the light for the seventh time shone upon the earth.

Now this observation seems to me to put to shame those who speak somewhat against the keeping of the Sabbath. Because, my brethren, in these days there are people who will speak against everything :

and so some have been found who say that, as the Sabbath was given only to the Jews, it does not concern us Christians to keep and observe it; that it is no more binding upon us than the other ceremonies which Moses commanded; and that though we may think it, perhaps, a convenient thing to observe the Sabbath, yet that it is not binding on us, as a religious law, to regard it as the Lord's day. Now these people seem to me to meet with an answer in the text; because it tells them that the Sabbath was set apart long before the Jews were in the world, long before Moses taught them as he was led by the Holy Ghost, long before Abraham talked with God, and was blessed with the promises. For it is impossible, with any fairness, but to take this as the beginning of the Sabbath; and here we find that the Sabbath was appointed as soon as the seventh day came. It was pronounced by the Lord, as soon as it rose, to be a blessed day, a day sanctified from other days, made holy and set apart. Whether the Jews, before they received the Ten Commandments, kept the Sabbath or neglected it, may be a matter of doubt; it is very likely the Egyptians, their hard taskmasters, greatly interfered with it. Whether the fourth commandment was to them a new thing, or whether it bound upon them an ancient religious duty, perhaps may be questioned; but we cannot help seeing from the Lesson for this day that the Sabbath itself was an old thing; that it began when the gracious work

of Christ, our Creator, ended ; and that the first day after the world was made was a day of holy rest, sanctified to the Lord.

Now if this is so, then the Sabbath is the very first observance which the Lord ordained ; it is the first law which it seemed good to God to make : and this I mention, because this first original law seems by many people to be looked on as a law of less importance than almost any law. But if it is the first law, then probably in no small degree every other law may depend upon it ; and in one sense this is the case. Because all the laws, both of God and man, do depend entirely upon the reverence we pay to God ; and the observance of the Sabbath is the main foundation on which a firm and full reverence of God stands.

Nevertheless, as I have said, this is a law which people think they may slight without committing any great sin. If we are thieves, if we bear false witness, if we are adulterers, or if we commit a murder, then we consider ourselves to be great sinners. All such sins are at once very hurtful amongst ourselves, and, if they became general, the world could not go on in peace ; therefore, because they bring trouble amongst ourselves, and because we love ourselves very much, we pronounce them at once to be very sinful, and loudly and openly condemn them. But our love of God is often a weak feeling, a cold thought only ; and so we can dishonour God, and neglect His law with

little compunction. Many a man, indeed, fears God; many a man, when he looks back upon his past life, dreads the just judgments of God. But the love of God is far less common: and because the love of the many towards their God and Saviour has thus waxed cold, therefore we condemn any sin which injures or dishonours ourselves, while we have but a faint rebuke, or none at all, for a sin which dishonours only the Lord God Almighty.

Nevertheless the first law which God laid down cannot be broken without a punishment; and I consider that Sabbath-breaking has perhaps more punishments which follow it than any other sin. At first sight we may say, 'What great evils will follow our not going to church?' When you desert your church your sinful tempers are left unproved, they are not sought out, you are not warned, you are not checked; and whatever evil there may be in the heart,—and all hearts have some,—whatever the evil is, it grows; it is not rebuked, it is not cut down, but it is left to spring freely, and to bear its fruits. My brethren, how many and how various are the sins which oppress and disgrace mankind; and yet ask the drunkard, ask the thief, ask the fornicator, or the murderer, how their sins a burden came, and they have all one and forsook my church; I followed idle company, I left off to follow God. I was perverse, and I cast my poor sinful soul out of the fold into the land of sin; and now my sins, like the unclean

the wilderness, do tear me, and rend me, and I am their prey !' This is the common cry, the common confession of the sinner. They who forsake God are themselves forsaken. "Them that honour Me will I honour, and they that despise Me shall be lightly esteemed^a." Lightly esteemed, my brethren, by the Spirit of the Lord ! Lightly esteemed by the Lord Jesus Christ ! You will have to seek redemption of a Redeemer who values you not ! Here is a curse which begins in this world, and never ends in the next. The soul that casts itself out is left to be an outcast ; it follows its own weaknesses and wickednesses ; Satan finds it temptations ; unguarded and unchecked, the sinner yields obedience, till punishment overtakes him in this world, and leads towards punishment for ever. Let a man in his practice break down this first law of God, and so tread under foot reverence of the Lord, and this sin may become the parent of any other sin whatsoever.

We are led, sometimes, to forsake the Sabbath services because of the sameness of them. The same prayers come round again Sunday after Sunday ; some of the prayers in the Morning and Evening Service are the same ; and though the Lessons vary throughout the year, and the Psalms throughout the week, still in the next year we have the same Lessons, and the same Psalms are read again the next month. Now they who are tempted by the spirit of a restless

^a 1 Sam. ii. 30.

love of change, dislike this. They who are like the giddy Athenians, and constantly desire to “hear some new thing^b,”—these object to this constant return of the same services and the same prayers. It is a fearful sign of a sinking religion and of an indisposition to godliness, when you want this constant stirring-up by something which is new. If you know your own hearts, and your spiritual wants, you will cling to those services where every want is satisfied, and where every sin finds its rebuke. If your religion is firm, determined, thoughtful, and humble, you will love those forms where your firmness is cherished by confiding prayers, where your determination is supported by the fullest promises, where your thoughtfulness is carried down into the depths of your own hearts, and your humility is comforted by the most gracious assurances. No doubt the words are the same,—constantly repeated. But, my brethren, are not your wants the same? Week after week is it not your duty, if you would make your hearts better, and increase, while you live, your peace of mind,—week after week, if we would tell the truth before the Lord God, is it not your duty to come here, and kneel down, and look back upon a catalogue of sins, and confess before God that the things are still undone which ought to have been done, and that the things are done which ought for ever to have been left undone?

^b Acts xvii. 21.

My brethren, among ourselves the fashion often is to keep up appearances and to ape righteousness ; but into the ear of Jesus Christ let us pour out the miserable truth of our own sinfulness. Let us not seek the place where we may be amused, or excited, or ravished by what the pulpit may give, but remember that the soul is to be saved, not to be amused, by religion. And let us see in what condition the soul really is. If we had this sober view of religion and of our duties, this sober, firm determination to see what the truth is, and to cleanse away sin ; not led by fancies, but living in the full purpose to follow Christ by humble prayer and strict self-searching,—then would the Church prayers appear so well chosen, so full, so humble, so comforting, that we should never wish for a change in them.

“Daniel prayed three times a day^c.” Now the Jews used forms of prayer ; and, no doubt, day after day the forms of this inspired prophet were much the same. And why ? because his failings, his weaknesses, his wants were all much the same. My brethren, it is so with us. If you confess here in the morning, is it not often the truth that when the afternoon comes, if every hasty word, every bad feeling, if every evil movement in the heart is to be accounted for,—is it not often the wretched truth that we may confess new sins in the afternoon ? And if we followed Daniel, and prayed three times a-day, could we not often find again a new sin to

^c Dan. vi. 10.

confess in the evening service? Is not this the mere simple, miserable truth?

And if it is so in our transgressions, assuredly it ought to be so in our thanksgivings. If we may well pray to God three times a-day, and thrice beseech His pardon and His grace, assuredly we ought to offer thanks as many times or more. The mercies which we receive from the Lord are continual. I will not tire you by reckoning up some of the infinite amount of the mercies of God: but one mercy I may mention. We commonly look upon our means, our bread, our clothing, our homes, our health, as God's great mercies to us; and so they are,—great mercies. And, sinners all, much will any man be perplexed to find a reason why he is preferred, and another man is denied, in these matters. But there is one greater mercy than these, which is, that we are here at all. My brethren, remember your offences, and then call to mind the pureness, the justice of Almighty God, and say who does not deserve the judgment-seat at once. My brethren, what would become of us if the Lord now took us? If the angel of death now came down amongst us, and took but one, should we not all shrink into ourselves with fear? Would not all join with me in prayer that that poor soul might be forgiven, and her sins not reckoned? Should we not all say, 'Poor wretched spirit, called with no warning! called with no warning!' But which of us does not deserve to be that spirit? Think of the pureness of the Lord God; think of yourselves; and

which of us can say that we do not deserve, (often called, often warned as we have been, often having grieved and wearied the Spirit of the Lord,) which of us does not deserve, to be that hastily summoned soul? My brethren, if these wholesome, these well-founded thoughts were planted deeply in our hearts, we should never think that we could thank God for "our preservation" too many times a-day.

My brethren, when the Lord Christ founded His Church here upon earth, He bestowed upon her so much of the Spirit as to know what there is in man, what are his wants, what are God's blessings; and the Lord so blessed His Church as to enable her to put into your lips prayers which, with beautiful feeling, tell of your griefs and utter your thanksgivings. I wish among her children two things were studied deeply,—your own hearts and the Church services; because then I know we should never say, 'What a sameness there is in them!' but 'How true they are! how full they are! how good they are!' For our bodies or for our souls there is not a word that we can shorten, or that we can say too often. But, of course, if we are ignorant of ourselves, if we are ignorant of our wants and of our blessings, then any service may seem useless to us, and tiresome.

I will now detain you but with one more remark, which arises, indeed, from what I have said. Many times we think it a sufficient reason to stay away from God's service if we do not happen to like the

preacher. The sermon is much more esteemed than the prayers; and this shews us what a very shallow thing our religious knowledge and feeling is. Your business as Christians, my brethren, is to save your souls from the pains of hell. The way to do this is to repent, to confess, to pray for forgiveness through the Lord Jesus; to pray for grace to walk through life with Christ; to labour earnestly to keep that holy path. Your salvation depends far more on what you do yourselves than on what I or any other preacher can say to you. The Church knows this; she knows that we ought all to have hearts quick to confess, honest and deep in repentance, and glad to pray; and so she has given us her forms, wherein, like a tender mother, she humbles the spirit but never slays it, lays bare the bosom before God, and fills the mouth with supplications so holy and so pure, that no heart ever truly and sincerely uttered them without receiving a returning grace. In these exercises her minister leads you: my brethren, to be sincere, how many of you follow? How often do we look upon the service as something to be submitted to, something to be gone through before the sermon comes. It is far more pleasant to be excited by the preacher than it is to humble ourselves, to chastise the soul, to bow down the heart, and to confess with burning tears, in the sight of God, that we are miserable sinners:—it is far more pleasant, but, like other sweet things, it is far less healthy. My brethren, a preacher, if

he will, when he speaks of the glory, or of the mercy, or of the power of the everlasting God ; when he speaks of the darkness, of the crafts, or of the wickednesses of our poor hearts ; or when he turns your eyes to that judgment-seat, and paints the future there, your own souls trembling, shrinking, hiding the face, and sinking down in fear before the presence of the Lord God ; when he shews you Satan, once your deceiver, now your strict, your loud, your keen accuser, and then points to that sea of fire wherein he would plunge you in his malice for ever and ever, while your poor spirits have but one word to answer, " Christ ! Christ !" and that holy Name uttered in trembling, in self-charging, and in dread,—my brethren, a preacher, if he will, when he touches these tremendous points, no doubt can readily reach your hearts, and some good may be done ; but for how long ? often only till you meet with the world again, till you visit " the farm," till you reckon up " the merchandize." While you are here the feeling is alive and warm, as you depart, it grows weaker, and when the Sabbath is gone, it is much overborne and forgotten in the cares of the world.

This, my brethren, is much the case with every sermon, wherever preached. The preacher can touch your hearts : but what can you do by prayer ? Prayer, coming from the depths of a faithful and contrite spirit, can touch the heart of the Lord Jesus Christ. Which is the best, what I can say, or what you can do ? I for a short season may move you ; if

God further me, may urge, may awaken a soul that God may send to drop in and hearken. But if you will search yourselves, know yourselves, fear yourselves, and pray, you may awaken the overflowing love, the abundant forgiveness, the supporting graces of the blessed Lord Jesus, the full consolations of the Spirit of the Lord.

These thoughts shew us how much we can do for ourselves, and how rich is the reward if we labour in our appointed work, if we keep God's Sabbath and sanctify it, as God's Church would lead us to do, by striving to sanctify in her exercises our hearts and lives.

Finally, my brethren, the text, which I have taken from the Lesson for the Evening Service, teaches us, in the first place, that the sanctification of the Sabbath was the first law laid down by the Lord God; and from this we learn that to break this law is not to commit, as we sometimes call it, a little sin, but it is wilfully to reject obedience, and to cast away reverence of the Lord. It is plainly to say, 'That law on which the honour due to Thy Name, O Lord, mainly stands, that law I will not keep, whenever either pleasure, or temptation, or idleness come in my way. I do not think it is of any great consequence if I say Thou mayest claim the seventh day, O Lord, but I will take it!' This is what a Sabbath-breaker does; it is what he says in his own heart, when he makes the Lord's day his own day. And I do tenderly but earnestly ask him to think

what his answer for these sayings and doings is to be, when he stands before God in the judgment-day? Next, we cannot but see, that when a man thus puts aside obedience to this law, that then he puts himself very much out of the grace and assistance of the Holy Spirit. Perhaps he does not think this any great matter either. Let him, however, as I have said, look to the histories of great criminals, and of persons put to death for grievous offences, and he will find that their first step in evil was a neglect of God's day. All they who are at all in the grace of God will know at once how necessary are the constant renewals of it; they know how weak they always are in themselves, and how much weaker they constantly become, if they let slip their religious observances.

Lastly, in our observances let there be holy forms, prepared to meet every human want and frailty, and fully and deeply founded on the Word of God. Because, where these forms are, there is something by which to exercise yourselves. You cannot use them without examining how they fit your own hearts; and no man ever made that examination without a turning towards the mercies of the Lord Jesus Christ. Study, my brethren, and learn these holy forms, and you will esteem them far beyond exhortation. Preaching may do much good or much harm; if it is sound it will be a comfort, a stay, a guide to your souls; but a knowledge of your religious services is far better; you carry about with you their holiness

in your bosoms. Exhortation may give you warm feelings, strong and proper thoughts, good resolutions, but these, as you may all have to confess, will yield before strong temptation. Satan is the first to represent to you that preaching is, after all, only the sayings of a man, and that every man may be in error. But that which you learn and follow yourselves cannot thus be put aside. You pray for forgiveness because you have measured your lives by God's services and Word, and you feel that you want forgiveness; you beseech God to give you His grace and guidance, because you have looked to your unsteady steps, and you know that you cannot stand without it; you confess your sins, because you know that you have sins, and you are weary of the burden of them. Then when you are tempted, you make answer at once, and firmly say, 'I will not add to this weight of sin; I will not defeat the grace of God; I will not thrust my forgiveness back; I will not fight against my own work; but I will resist this temptation in the strength of the Lord, and I will go forward in my way, thanking Christ the Lord, who is unto me "a means of grace, and a hope of glory."'

My brethren, it is in this firm, this steady, this safe course that the Church would have you walk. I feel sure, if you will enter upon it, and follow it with true hearts, that you will find the Lord in it; and I, as one sent unto you from the Lord, beseech you always thus to walk with God, and always to stay upon Him.

SERMON XV.

Sexagesima Sunday.

GENESIS vi. 8, 9.

But Noah found grace in the eyes of the Lord. These are the generations of Noah: Noah was a just man and perfect in his generations, and Noah walked with God.

WHEN we are told that Noah “was perfect in his generations,” I conclude we must understand that he was sprung from a line of forefathers who had been stedfast and faithful worshippers of the Lord, and had been kept pure from the sins which stained the rest of mankind; this remark seems to me to explain the only part of my text which is not perfectly clear. The text, as you may remember, is taken from the first Lesson of the Evening Service, a Lesson which informs us that the Lord had determined to bring a flood over the earth and to destroy man from the face thereof, but that Noah found grace, because “he was a just man, and walked with God.”

Any chapter in the Bible, or any verse, which declares to us the Mind of the Lord God, and which gives us the reasons which have moved the Lord to any course, is of the utmost value to us; because in

such statements we have the "veil" lifted up, as it were, and we are able, in so far, to look into the Holy of Holies, and to see God as He is. We can then tell to a certainty how the Lord will deal with ourselves, when we find that we are living the lives which we have found the Lord either blessing or punishing. When the Lord saith, "I will destroy man whom I have created from the face of the earth, because every imagination of the thoughts of his heart are only evil continually," and "I will spare righteous Noah, because he is a just man and walketh with God,"—then it is impossible not to see that sin is the direct cause of God's wrath and punishments, and that a faithful obedience will be blessed of the Lord. These sayings tend to make religion a simple and plain thing, to make it, what a revelation surely is, a thing made clear, and they strip it of many distinctions and nice questions, most of which arise from human ingenuities. To plain readers, then, chapters like this before us are among the most valuable parts of the Bible; and we can never be thankful enough to God in that He hath revealed Himself in them to mankind.

I will now, therefore, go on to consider one or two plain statements which the text either contains or alludes to, and will so take the chief matter of the chapter itself. When the text says that "Noah found grace in the eyes of the Lord," it refers to the flood which the Lord was about to bring upon the earth. Now from this we receive a lesson which I will first

open. We are told, in the determination of the Lord to destroy the world, that there is such a thing as judgment overtaking sin even in this life. Many people when they hear of a judgment following upon a sin, sneer and deride, if it is said to be God's doing : they disbelieve that God sends the punishment, and they maintain that it came by accident, or was brought about by the skill of those who detected the sin. I believe that there is no one who will say that God never punishes a sin ; but many people think it superstitious and a straining of religion to say, when a punishment befalls a wicked man, that it is God's judgment overtaking him. But still, what else can it be ? If the Lord does order the events of this world, if the sparrow, as she comes to the ground, is in the hand of God, then in whose hand is punishment for sin ? For my part, I believe that the judgments of God are very common. The long-suffering of the Lord is so very common also,—thanks be to God for His mercy and forbearance,—the long-suffering of the Lord is so common, that sin is by no means always and immediately followed by punishment ; and in many cases this forbearance, as far as we know, is lengthened out even till the sinner dies, and till God reckons with him in the grave. These long-suffering mercies, no doubt, come of Christ's yearnings towards man, that even at the eleventh hour we may come in and be saved ; and, as I have said, such mercies are common.

Nevertheless, I verily believe, that to a man who

lives with God in the world, to a man who will look at evil actions and square them with God's Word, and then ask, 'Will these things be permitted to succeed?' 'will God indeed let this wickedness prosper?' I verily believe that as he watches what comes to pass, very often that man will see the judgment of the Lord slowly but fatally unfolding itself, and overwhelming the sinner. My brethren, there are few thoughtful men, of any age, who will not think that they have sometimes seen a sin committed, and afterwards have seen out of the evil deed itself, punishment come up and pierce the hand that did it. Oftentimes when we do a wrong act, from the very wrong itself the judgment will come forth, and, like a vast, an unnatural, and gigantic child, will arise upon and destroy the parent that created it. And, my brethren, I think that God orders these things, and that they are His judgments; and I believe that the Lesson ordered by the Church of Jesus Christ this evening, gives us the same warning, only it says farther that the judgments of the Lord may be not only single and individual, but general and spread abroad over the face of the whole world.

But then it is said that this way of calling all misfortunes and evil events, as they befall our neighbours, the direct judgments of the Lord, is sure to promote a very unchristian and uncharitable temper; "Think ye," saith our Lord, "that those eighteen, upon whom the tower in Siloam fell, and slew them, think ye that they were sinners

above all men that dwelt in Jerusalem^a?" No, my brethren, it is said that they were not; they, it may be, were cut off to shew how suddenly we may be taken, and how unstable life is. They might have been seen to be ready to go, and their sudden death, while it was a warning to all, might to themselves have been the last and the most crowning mercy, the unlooked-for reception into the bliss of Christ. I would not have you, when you see any sad mischance, any fearful visitation, begin to search for the sins of him that is visited, in order that you may say "he is under a judgment, and smitten of the Lord:" still, if you see and know a determined and wilful life of sin, wrong, evil-doing, at last visited and sunk in punishment, then, I think, you may stop, and ask in a trembling tone, 'Do I not see the Hand of God? But if God's judgments do move upon the earth, it is not my neighbours alone who may feel them; may they not overtake myself, even as our Saviour said to the Jews about those who were killed at Siloam, "Except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish^b?"' Now is not this a thought which we may cherish with a great increase of humbleness in our own hearts? will it not lead us to search our lives? is it not a consideration which may be pressed home on ourselves without breaking through any charity? and will not many a very true conclusion come out of it?

This is the main use which I would wish you to

^a Luke xiii. 4.

^b Ib. 5.

make of the doctrine that the judgments of the Lord are common things in the world. I would have you turn this belief upon yourselves, more than on your neighbours; “to his own master he standeth or falleth^c ;” but turn this belief upon yourselves. When distress or evil fortune comes to you, then ask, ‘Is not this a judgment? is not this only what I deserve? Let me search my life, let me reckon up my pride, it may be, my wrong dealing, my loose living, my hard-heartedness; let me reckon up my doings,—and is not this a judgment? have I anything whereof to complain? might I not expect that a just God would find me out? is not this judgment also a mercy? has it not made me look into myself? has it not taught me how little worth the world is? may it not bring me into a better mind, into a better trust? My brethren, this is the best way to use this doctrine, and then, like every other Bible-truth, it is a very healing belief. I am sure when calamity may come upon us, whenever suffering and sorrow enter into our dwellings, I am sure if then we trembled and asked, ‘Do I not see the hand of God?’ I am sure there would be then no noisy discontent, but the heart would make her ready answer, “It is the Lord^d !” “The Lord is in this place and I knew it not^e !” The head would bow down and pray, and seeing God’s hand, we should kiss the rod, and having the Lord in our dwelling-place, we should

^c Rom. xiv, 4.^d 1 Sam. iii. 18.^e Gen. xxviii. 16.

cast ourselves in the dust before Him, we should humble ourselves, and “rend our hearts,” and before we had ceased talking with God, we should be more at peace with Him. My brethren, in this uncertain world, and where we are all in sin, there is no house into which God’s judgments may not most justly enter, and I do pray, both for myself and for you all, that in this temper we may all ever meet our sorrows and afflictions, and thus “out of the strong” may “come forth sweetness’!”

“But Noah found grace,” and the judgments of the Lord did not descend upon him. The chapter gives us the reason, because “Noah was a just man.” Now if to be just will turn away the wrath of God, what, my brethren, does the word “just” mean? It is the same as to be righteous,—both words mean the same thing,—to do that which is right, to do that which justly ought to be done, either towards God or towards man. Now this is the reason why the Church hastens to teach even children in the first years of infancy their duty towards God, and their duty towards their neighbour; because, though it is likely they cannot, when they learn these things, understand them and feel them fully, yet these lessons will remain in the memory, and as the understanding ripens they will be understood, and then the child will have learnt his duty both towards God and towards man, will have learnt how to do righteous-

’ Judges xiv. 14.

ness, how to be a "righteous man^s," how, under Christ, to turn away the wrath of God.

My brethren, these early lessons by rote are not to be derided as some will deride them. At all events, they subdue the child, and keep him obedient, and I am sure there are many children in the carelessness of these times, left to be very wild and wilful. But they do far more than that; I know that they put into the mind religious feelings and Christian doctrines of the greatest value, which, as the understanding grows, come to be apprehended, and which never would be so strongly rooted, if they were not learnt then. This, no doubt, was the way in which, by the mercy of the Lord, most of us learnt these things, and we may well consent to say that we should never have learnt them so well, if indeed we had learnt them at all, had they been put off to after-life.

Noah, then, did that which was right, that which was just, both to God and man; and this, through God's mercy and Christ's merits, saved him. From this we learn, that the religion which saves a man is that religion which does not think and feel only, but which acts and does also. And, my brethren, how this brings the Bible to agree with itself all through. In the beginning of the Bible we have this example of Noah, who, being a faithful man, one who "walked with God," therefore did justly, and "found grace."

At the end of the Bible we have the same thing laid down; St. James^h tells us that the faith which does not produce good living is a dead faith. One part of the Bible tells us that unless faith is fruitful in good living, the man will not be saved; and the other part of the Bible shews that, where the man was faithful and fruitful in good works, he was saved. This great leading doctrine, therefore, which runs all through the Word of God, you must never be tempted to cast aside.

But then you may be asked, ‘Can there be a faith which is not fruitful in good works?’ I suppose, my brethren, there can, because the inspired Apostle saith that there can, and warns you not to have such a deadness, but to be quick, to have a lively faith bringing forth abundantly; and because Christ our Redeemer, if such His mercy may be, saith that there can be such a deadness:—“The servant,” saith the Saviour, “who knew his Lord’s will, and prepared not himself, neither did according to His will, shall be beaten with many stripes[!].” It is right always to answer out of the Word, and not out of our own hearts; but if I may speak what I fear in this matter, then I say that, in the journey through life, it is not hard to find souls who have believed well, but have not done well. One thing we may do, we may confess; and I can say, for one, that I have often done things against my belief; and I will ask you, if you

^h James ii.

[!] Luke xii. 47.

cannot all make answer and say ‘Yes,’ and, ‘We are all one man’s sons^k,’ ‘we are all thy brethren in that confession?’ Never, then, flatter yourselves that your belief is enough, and that good living must come of itself: Satan will tempt you with this sort of doctrine, and your own lazy hearts will tempt you with it. It is a hard matter to fight against the flesh, it is hard to exalt the glory of the Lord, it is hard to do good works; these things go against the flesh, and Satan and our own hearts will join together to say, ‘Let it alone, be at rest, be at rest.’ St. James saith the sense of that is, “Be dead, be dead;” and in the Gospel read this day, the Lord Jesus saith that that is the seed which was stifled and brought forth no fruit. I will end this with one question:—Have we not often met persons with the words “Lord, Lord,” on their lips, and the fruits of unrighteousness, injustice, in their hands?

This question leads to another. I may be asked, ‘Noah is not said to have been unrighteous, can I then, if I leave my unjust doings, stand beside Noah and find grace?’ I answer, let this man keep his Church, and carry home in his memory every Sabbath the first promise which the Church makes, and which she borrows from the prophet of God, “When the wicked man turneth away from his wickedness which he hath committed, and doeth that which is lawful and right, he shall save his soul alive^l.”

^k Gen. xlii. 11.

^l Ezek. xviii. 27.

It is reasonable enough for a man to doubt whether his good deeds, if he amends his evil life, will indeed wipe out the remembrance of his sins. A man ought to live righteously all his life : if, in the grace of God, he doeth a good work, let him always say, and look back upon his shortcomings and sins, "This I ought to have done, and not to have left the other undone^m." So that the doing his duty at the end of his days, is only doing then that which he ought to do, and therefore it may well be asked, 'Will this bring a pardon for that portion of my days which was spent in offence?'

God, in His mercy, promises that it shall ; and the Lord Jesus Christ has died to purchase a pardon for offences repented of and forsaken, and to hallow and render acceptable our poor, unworthy services. So that, under Christ, a man may walk surely, if he will only walk sincerely, with God. Faith, springing from repentance, and bringing forth good works, shall be accounted to him, through the Lord Jesus, as righteousness ; but he that was a righteous, a "just man," "found grace."

When the Lessons appointed by the Church serve to impress upon her congregation any great leading doctrine, there can be no question but it is the duty of her priest to enlarge and insist upon it, because it is plainly what the Church deems best on that occasion to lay before her people. But I the rather speak

^m Matt. xxiii. 23.

fully on this point, because a righteous life is, in fact, the most difficult part of the duty of a Christian. It is both easy and common to follow with submission of mind and pleasure in the heart, preachers who speak of the feelings and the transports of religion; it is also common to neglect sermons which demand with strictness the doings of religion. The heart of man is against self-denial, and the works of religion demand self-denial; to deny pride, to deny vanity, to deny licentiousness and excesses, to deny ill-feeling and contention,—these are the fruits which our Lord demands that our religion should bear, both for His glory and for the good of mankind. These are the fruits of true religion, and, like other fruits, they are the things which come last. Religious feeling is very common, religious ecstasy is not uncommon; but do these feelings always bear good fruit? When the tree is sound, when religion is sound, then comes the good fruit: examine yourselves therefore.

How often is a man who feels warmly about religion, contentious and unkindly! how often is he proud,—proud, perhaps, about what he esteems his strong call to godliness, what he fancies his more assured condition! how often is he vain, perhaps, and delighting in vanities and little emptinesses! Now these tempers,—and we may often find many far worse than these among those who trust that they be saved,—these tempers put a canker at once upon his religious feelings. Compare yourselves with the

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to salvation, is a doctrine which many people will cry down. It is cried down, though you cannot read the Bible without finding it all through the book, nor can you read your own hearts, without feeling that it is the very thing most contrary to the lusts of the flesh, and without which it is quite impossible that the Lord should be duly honoured in your hearts. Nevertheless, such is the weakness of the flesh, such the fondness with which we would willingly indulge ourselves, that we are fain to discover easier roads to heaven, and cry up calls, persuasions, feelings, transports, anything which lays down no strict laws, and to cry down firm obedience founded on firm faith. Now I make no doubt, when the faith of Noah led him to build the ark, that there were plenty to jeer and to deride his work, obedient as it was to his belief in God; plenty to say, ‘Why this vast ship? and upon the dry ground? why this preparation? We see no flood, we see no clouds, but “all things continue as they were from the beginning of the creation^a.”’ Now this appeared not unreasonable, because the earth never had been destroyed then, and the flood seemed a very unlikely thing. But Noah had faith, and his faith shewed itself in his labours, and he was saved by them. Now we are ordered to bring our lives to the foot of the cross, deeply corrected, filled with obedient labours, most humbly self-condemned, and

^a 2 Pet. iii. 4.

there laying down the imperfect offering, to implore the pardon of Christ for its shortness and imperfection, and to beseech Him to intercede for us.

This is our ark, and another flood is coming, the flood of fire. In this course of labour we shall find our escape; but we must believe that if we wilfully leave any part of it incomplete and unfinished that we shall perish, as Noah would have perished if he had attended to the derisions of those who saw his labours, and had left his ark unfinished.

My brethren, we must thank God, that religion is a plain thing, if we will read it plainly and with no self-seeking; but that it is a painful thing, that it is a continual labour, that it is a “striving for the mastery,” that it is a “hard race,” that it is “a fight°,”—all which words shew labour and works: that it is this hard course, we must thank our tempter Satan, and our own fallen hearts. Still no preaching must disguise these truths from you, and no tenderness to yourselves, no indulgences to the weakness of the flesh, must make you disregard them, or put them aside.

° 1 Cor. ix. 24—27.

SERMON XVI.

Quinquagesima Sunday.

1 COR. xiii. 13.

Now abideth faith, hope, charity, these three ; but the greatest of these is charity.

CHARITY and love, when used in the Bible, are words which have a very full meaning. Charity means much more than almsgiving. That charity does embrace almsgiving among other good deeds is, as its fruit, no doubt true ; and that where almsgiving according to our means is not, there charity is not, is also true. There can also be no doubt but almsgiving is well-pleasing to God, and is constantly mentioned as a virtuous course of action, which will be so acceptable to the Lord Christ as to move Him to plead the saving and pardoning merits of His sacrifice on the cross, in favour of that man who is found to have been a willing helper of those who are in need. I suppose, when we read those words, “Come, ye blessed of My Father, inherit the Kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world : for I was an hungred, and ye gave Me meat : I was thirsty, and ye gave Me drink : I was a stranger, and ye took Me in : naked, and ye clothed Me : sick,

and ye visited Me^a," I suppose we are to take these words in their plain literal meaning; so also when we read, "Depart from Me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels: for I was an hungred, and ye gave Me no meat: I was thirsty, and ye gave Me no drink: naked, and ye clothed Me not: sick, and ye visited Me not: for inasmuch as ye did it not to one of the least of these, ye did it not unto Me^b," I suppose we are to read this passage also in its simple and obvious sense.

I suppose all this, because the command seems to be only the notice of the same precepts given us before, by an unchanging God, in the Old Testament, where we find it as follows, and with a promise added to it, "If thine enemy be hungry, give him bread to eat: if he be thirsty, give him water to drink: for thou shalt heap coals of fire upon his head, and the Lord shall reward thee^c." For it seems to follow, as a matter of course, that if we are to be kind,—if we are commanded to do good to those who are hurtful to us,—much more must we be doing good to those who have never offended us; and if we fail in doing these kind actions to our poor and well-conducted neighbours, it would seem that there must be a heart within us lacking Christian tenderness, and that the love of this world's goods must be strong within us to the danger of our souls.

There are so many passages of this kind in the

^a Matt. xxv. 34—36.

^b Ib. 41, 42, 45.

^c Prov. xxv. 21, 22; conf. Rom. xii. 20.

Bible, and they are all so plain, and so benevolent withal, so likened unto the loving-kindness of an all-forgiving God, that it is not possible to explain them away fairly, or to alter their meaning ; at least if they can be altered or explained away, then, I am sure, the whole Bible may be explained away also.

Almsgiving, therefore, is a part of charity. Howbeit, almsgiving is not the whole of charity : charity is more than this ; it is a grace residing in the heart ; and in many ways a poor person may be charitable as easily as a rich person, and where this charitable spirit is wanting in the poor man, he also stands in danger, as an outcast in the sight of the Lord Jesus.

I will shew you how a poor man may be charitable. Almsgiving is his duty as far as he can, but as that is not much, I will not press that point. He must be charitable in spirit. Do you ask what that means ? My brethren, scandal, backbiting, slander,—what do these things mean ? They mean “all uncharitableness.” Grudging another man’s goods, coveting, envying the good fortune of another,—what does that mean ? It means that our spirit and God’s grace are asunder : “charity envieth not.” If these tempers are opposed to this heavenly grace, how many persons are there who are thus opposed to charity ? The temper which is required of every Christian before he can, as a Christian, call on his Saviour Christ, is the spirit of universal benevolence and goodwill towards all men ; a spirit which will lead to acts of benevolence and almsgiving, and will delight in such courses and

habits; but a spirit also which will view every one's character favourably and kindly, which will be at peace with every one, which will forgive the injuries of every one, which will pray for every one, labour for every one, rejoice with every one's happiness, and mourn in every one's sorrow. This is that charity which the Lord Jesus Christ shewed upon earth, and which He requires of all those who will walk in His steps, and which alone, as St. Peter teaches us, can "cover the multitude of sins^d."

It is now probable that we may begin to see why of faith, hope, and charity, the greatest is said to be charity. Faith is said by St. Paul to "justify us;" and it is also said that "hope maketh not ashamed^e;" howbeit charity is greater: greater than that which justifieth, greater than that which takes away our shame. "How can these things be?" It is probable, however, that what has been said will lead us to the meaning of this text. Charity is greater, because it is a feeling which is to last for ever. In heaven, in eternity, when the forgiven are accepted into everlasting blessedness, charity will be the character and the occupation of the blessed. Well is it written, "Charity never faileth." Even after this world has passed away, the charity sent here, in grace, into our hearts, still will survive, will rule our spirits, and be our moving temper. Faith will be ended, absorbed in knowledge; hope will lose her anxious character,

^d 1 Pet. iv. 8.

^e Rom. v. 5.

and will be lost in possession; but charity remaineth: remaineth as that temper which will fill us with joy in doing the gracious offices which the Lord may appoint to us there; bearing continually, it may be, His blessing to those worlds which will still remain, or will be fresh created; shielding perhaps from evil other earths, which will still exist, uncalled into eternal peace, and as yet unripe for bliss; remaineth as that temper which will regulate and attune the intercourse and communion between one blessed spirit and another in heaven; remaineth as that temper which shall make us "like Christ, when we shall see Him as He is^f." These may be among the reasons why charity is called the greatest of these graces. It is that temper which will outlive the world, which will be unchanged for ever, so that the accepted shall feel their hearts to be an everlasting well-spring of loving-kindness, and these spirits shall convey to others never-failing outpourings of love, while they shall strengthen and delight themselves in the abundance of their own goodness.

So also charity may be called the greatest grace, because it is part of the character of God Himself. That which can change our fallen nature back again, in any degree to be "the image of God," must be one of the greatest graces. But this spirit of universal benevolence is one of the blessed attributes of God Himself. It is that loving-kindness which "in

^f 1 John iii. 2.

the beginning" first moved the Almighty to call the worlds, and all that therein is, out of darkness and emptiness. It is that loving-kindness upon which every one of us hath hung ever since he was born; it is that loving-kindness which we all must appeal unto, all must cry unto, when we stand in our judgment, and, but for Christ's mercy, in our extremity. Like unto this temper shall we be when we are pure and charitable spirits in heaven. Then in a true and blessed sense "we shall be as gods," when we are the children, the accepted, the freely-forgiven "children, of the Most High^s." It is in this spirit of charity that we shall be God's true children; it is in never-failing love, it is in pure and unchanging tenderness and goodness, it is in everlasting loving-kindness towards all in heaven, and all that God can bless under the heavens, that we shall approach to the unspeakable perfection, the undefinable purities, graces, and goodness of the Almighty Creator, Himself the great Source of good.

These may, perhaps, stand among the reasons why of faith, hope, and charity, charity is said to be the greatest. Charity also may be said to be the greater on account of another reason, and this is a reason by which I entreat you to try yourselves. Charity is scarcer than faith or hope. That which is scarce is thought to be valuable, and is more esteemed. Of these graces, charity is by far the most rare. As to

faith; I, for one, would boldly ask, who does not believe? Many may believe wrongly in points, or their belief may fall short, but in the great leading points of faith who is there that does not believe? Disbelieve altogether a man cannot. Many a bad man would disbelieve if he could, but he cannot. No bad man leaves the world without dreading that his sins may rise up against him, and condemn him; he fears that a just God may punish him for them, and he trembles. This may not be, and of course is not, a full Gospel belief, it is no justifying faith; but, as far as it goes, it is faith, and a faith moreover calculated to affect his conduct.

So also if faith, in some degree or other, is an universal feeling, hope also is not less common. It is, in fact, commonly found not only in every heart, but far too strong in many hearts. Many a man will hope both against his reason and against his belief. Many a man will indulge himself in sins, will pass, perhaps, a long life of impurity or iniquity, and nevertheless have a good degree of hope. He will flatter himself that God is so merciful that He will never reckon severely with him in the end; that He will overlook and pardon what He has said He will not overlook; that He will accept any repentance, and will be appeased by the slightest amendment, and that sin and vice may be indulged without the danger which the Word of God asserts to follow them; that heaven and peace may be obtained through the tender mercies of the Lord Christ, without serious

endeavours, without earnest and humble prayer, without constant and strenuous watchfulness, without labour to live in obedience to Jesus Christ.

My brethren, people constantly leave the world in this way. Their minister may urge the commandments of God, may point out their sin, may exhort that it be forsaken, may rebuke its evil fruits, may press, may beseech amendment, may warn the sinner of his coming downfall; the sinner may agree in the truth of all that is said, and keep the sin nevertheless, and with it keep his hope also. Many, many men die in this self-deceit. Nothing is more common than to find a man leaving the world whose belief, whatever its extent may be, is right, as far as it does extend; whose hopes of salvation are strong and comforting, while the whole course of the life, up to its end, has been marked and stained deeply by habitual sin. Though there has been a faith, though there has been a hope through life, and up to the end of life, there has not been charity. Charity has been wanting, and has never governed the life.

Now this is a common case in every priest's intercourse with his flock, and it serves strongly to shew that, in every congregation, charity is scarcer than faith or hope; while also it seems to set in another light its great value to mankind, and also its direct tendency to maintain, and even where it has been dimmed, to bring to light upon the earth the glory of the Lord God. This, then, may be said to be another reason why charity is said to be greater than

faith or hope. Certainly when the full meaning of the Gospel word 'love,' or 'charity,' is remembered; when its immense and invaluable importance to the Christian character is kept in mind; when, moreover, it is considered that where this grace is wanting Christ's promise is not offered,—then every Christian will feel overwhelmed, as it were, with the weight, with the varied amount of his responsibilities, will be deeply humbled within, will fear God and pray.

Let us now conclude this sermon by turning upon ourselves the thoughts which have been laid before us.

We, then, have faith. In some degree or other we have faith, and faith more or less true, more or less in agreement with the doctrines once delivered to the Church of the Lord Jesus Christ by the apostles, who "walked with God," and by the sainted Fathers of the Church, who took their teaching from the apostles themselves. In all the great leading and essential doctrines of the apostles, this branch of Christ's Church, built up by His mercy upon them, and handed down from them to us in these days, is one and the same with the Church as founded at first by them. We can in faith join in the same confession, unite in the same Holy Communion, bear our children to the same Baptism. We can repeat the same creeds which the apostles and the first Fathers of the Church used, and in all main points we are still the very Church which the apo-

stles of the Lord founded on His grace. We follow the same spiritual rule and government which the apostles first gave unto us. We look for salvation to the Cross of Christ, and in the same spirit of confession, humiliation, and prayer. In all its great points our faith is the same faith which Christ's apostles held and planted; it has been truly and religiously handed down to us through that line of bishops which they originated and consecrated, and there is no doubt whatever but it may be a saving faith.

So also we have hope; and our hope is placed where it ought to be, owing to the apostolic teaching wherewith we are blessed. It is placed not on ourselves, nor in our own righteousness, not "on the strength of our own arm, nor our own right hand," but it rests upon the Sacrifice of the Lord Jesus, and on His tender mercies and loving-kindness towards men. I suppose, my brethren, there is not one amongst us who has not some degree of hope, hope of the Christian character which I have stated. If there is any one who has no hope, or whose hope does not stand solely on the Blood of the Lord Christ, he has rightly no place in any Christian congregation. Our hope will be more or less strong according as each man is accused more or less in conscience; but hope, to some amount, every one of us has. I doubt not also, for another reason, that this is the case with every one of us; because through God's mercy towards us, hope is the very last grace

which the Lord God withdraws from the sinner. Long after plain and cold reason, looking over a defeated and sinful course ; long after reason would say, 'The race is lost, the goal is not reached, the prize cannot be mine ;' long after despair would seem to have found a standing-place in the heart, and would have let in that which would slay the soul, carelessness, coldness, listlessness in obedience ; long after such a miserable and fatal state might be thought reasonable, the Holy Spirit of the Lord God will still brood over the chaos, will still bestow the light of hope, and so will still keep alive, however faint it may be, the wish yet to struggle, "to work yet together with God." Hope makes a man look towards heaven, lean towards heaven ; it constantly tends that way ; and making a sinner feel that salvation may still be attained, hope invariably draws him on to make some attempts to travel in the "strait path." Hope, no doubt, in many a sinner's soul, where the world little observes the movement, awakens deep and trembling prayers ; in many a spirit hope will often sweetly bring in repentance, and so with no violence, but with a natural action of the soul, it will lead many a wicked man back again to Christ. This, no doubt, is a reason why the Lord will often overrule the fears of a sinner in some degree, and will leave hope as the very last grace that He will withdraw. No doubt, therefore, my brethren, whether with reason or against reason, you may all have hope. .

Have you, then, charity? In some degree you have charity; some one part, some another part of this grace; but who has the whole? Some may have almsgiving, indeed, but not full charity, inasmuch as they are lustful and licentious; some may be pure and cleanly-minded, but have not charity, in that they be hard-hearted; some may be temperate and honest in their lives, but have not charity, because they are envious; some may not be envious, or grudging, but have not charity, because they do evil to their fellow-creatures, most likely to their own household, by intemperate courses. And there are many more breaches of the duties of charity besides these common sins which I have mentioned. Have you, then, charity? But if every sin which can be shewn to be directly opposed to Christian peace and Christian godliness, is a godless breach of charity, where does charity end? It ends not, as I have said, while we live upon earth, nor when we have passed up, through pardon and God's charity, into heaven. It is as wide a duty in its compass as it is endless in its duration. It "never faileth," but it comprises all purity: it forbids every deed which wounds our fellow-creatures either in mind, body, or estate; it forbids us to put any temptation in his way; it compels us to put them out of his way as often as we can. Surely, then, you say, it is a vast duty; so vast is it, that, if we were Christians altogether, it would spread over the whole world, as well as throughout the boundless kingdoms of the Lord God in heaven. How can we

learn it all, and gather up all its lessons? This would seem to be a difficult question; but He, Who ordained charity to be our general and ruling principle, wrote His law in two short sentences, "Love God with all your heart," and "Love your neighbour as yourself." This is the charity enjoined by the Lord Jesus, this is the charity which the Saviour of man promises to pour into our hearts,—who, then, has it? It is said to be the greatest Christian grace. Examine yourselves.

From what has been said, I think we may collect that while heaven is, by God's grace, open to all men, and while Christ has died in order that salvation may be offered to the whole of His creation, nevertheless heaven and salvation are not to be obtained without labour and effort on our part. A careless, acquiescent faith,—a hope more flattering than well founded,—a course of life which wounds and offends many of the great branches of Christian charity,—is the usual and common stamp of Christianity among mankind. This, however, is not the amount of what is demanded of us. We must go beyond it, and very far beyond it. There is no Gospel promise to carelessness and coldness. Eternal peace in the presence of Almighty God, eternal glory and reward, are not bestowed on languid efforts and slight regards marred with deep stains and wilful foulness. You must be in earnest; your faith must be sound and strong; your hope alive with gratitude and fervency, and standing always on self-searching

and prayer; your charity must govern every action of your life which can regard mankind.

These powerful graces come by prayer. Few there be that ask for them; few, therefore, obtain them; few, therefore, will "be chosen." My brethren, I do conjure you be among that 'few.' With earnest prayers that God will enlighten you, govern and strengthen you, strive to walk in "the narrow path," and among the 'few.' I know not else how you can maintain either the faith or the hope that you will ever hear the words, the pardoning words of the Lord Jesus Christ,—“Come unto Me;” “Fear not, little flock; for it is your Father’s good pleasure to give you the kingdom^h.”

^h Luke xii. 32.

SERMON XVII.

First Sunday in Lent.

ST. MATTHEW iv. 11.

Then the devil leaveth Him, and behold angels came and ministered unto Him.

THE season of Lent, in every branch of the Church of Christ, is set apart as the season for a strict fast. In the Anglican Church, however, it is now very little observed, and this seems to arise from that love of vanity and pleasure which, arising out of our wealth, is so sinfully common in England. It *was* thought that we could not do better than to subdue the worldliness of the mind by self-denials, and by abstinence from indulgences to turn the soul towards religious contemplations, when we were about to commemorate the resurrection of the Lord Christ at Easter, and to meditate on the crucifixion of the Son of God on Good Friday. Other Churches throughout Christendom still, as I believe, keep Lent as a fast, but I fear in England, such is our love of this world, that it is more noted in the calendar than in practice.

The Gospel for the Communion Service of this day is chosen most probably by the Church, not only to strengthen us in good resolutions, by shewing us an

instance of successful resistance to temptation on the part of the Lord Jesus, but also to turn our minds to the manner in which temptation was met, so as to give us a safe mode of "resisting the devil," as well as to comfort us with the assurance of victory if our resistance is sincere. I conclude, therefore, that I shall best follow out the teaching of the Church, if I attempt, in reliance on God's help, to bring these points more immediately before your minds.

The history of this event opens with a statement very briefly told: "Then was Jesus led up of the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted of the devil." Perhaps I may stop at this point, not without advantage, to notice in a short way one objection, which I have heard when this event has been brought into view. I have heard the whole history itself discredited; and this and many other passages of the Bible set at nought, by unbelieving men, who do not hesitate to say that, in the whole created world, there is no such being in existence as the devil. It is not generally my wish to notice, to a simple-minded and believing congregation, every flippant or unreasonable objection which an inconsiderate reader of his Bible or an open scoffer at God's Word may choose to bring against the Gospels of the Lord Jesus Christ; but in these days of restlessness and bold assertion, perhaps your priest is not so much at liberty as heretofore to pass by in silence hostile and false remarks.

The argument by which the unbeliever endeavours

to maintain the point that no such being as the devil exists, is this:—‘God is a Being of infinite wisdom, infinite goodness, and infinite power; therefore, as it is clear that His wisdom and His goodness must compel Him to abhor and to oppose Satan, so by His infinite power He would remove him and destroy him.’ This is the argument which is thought strong enough to prove either that Satan never existed, or that, if he ever was called into existence, he must long ago have been consigned to utter destruction. Unhappily, however, for the eternal peace and the spiritual welfare of all mankind, the very same argument will prove to us, just as well, that there must be in existence an evil spirit,—and moreover, an evil spirit very subtle, very busy, very malignant, and very bold, because it is by far too clear that there is in the world a great mass of vice and wickedness, and also a great mass of evil and distress. Now as God is a God of infinite wisdom and infinite goodness, it will follow, just as well, that this vice and crime, this evil and distress, cannot be caused by the God of all goodness and mercy, and therefore it directly follows that it must arise from some other cause,—which cause we, following Scripture doctrine, call the devil. Nor does this argument fail, if we have it answered by the remark that the evil and the crime arise out of our own wicked hearts; because a wise and a good God never would have created, nor did He create, wicked hearts; He would have made them innocent and pure: He did so make

them ; and the evil and the wickedness must have been placed in them by some other being, and so we must come at last to some one who has fallen by his own sin, without being tempted by another. It follows then that the Bible statement, that there is a tempter, that there is a destroyer of souls, that there is a wicked one, that Satan exists, cannot be shaken or upset by the argument which I have mentioned ; and therefore that you must still struggle against your enemy, still “resist the devil^a,” still labour with fear, and pray in faith and anxious hope that you may overcome his temptations.

He is an enemy so active, that his harvest of pain and crime springs up and stands thick everywhere ; he is so malignant, that the corruption of every created soul, of the entire world and all that therein is, is his object and his endeavour ; he is so crafty, that sin of every sort, vice of every colour, taste, and character, is placed before us ; while he is so subtle that, in banishing one temptation, we are often betrayed by him into another, and while we seem to be triumphant on one hand, we may, on the other side, be defeated. If we are learned, we may be proud ; if we are chaste, we may be censorious ; if we are pious, we may be judges of others ; if we are charitable, we may be vain-glorious ; if prudent, niggardly. Vice so abundant in shape and character, so contrived to suit every weakness in our tempers, so strong to destroy, and so universal withal, and with so cruel an

^a James iv. 7.

object, has an originator and an inventor ; and that inventor is Satan, our enemy, the devil, the destroyer of human happiness here, and of eternal souls hereafter.

Satan is stated to have been in appearance personally on earth at least three times. The first time is when, in the third chapter of Genesis, we read that he tempted Adam and Eve and brought sin into the world ; the second time is when we read again, in the Book of Job, that he personally interfered, and brought upon that holy man the severest trials,—ruin, namely, in his estate, the death of his youthful and flourishing family, and the painful and loathsome diseases of the body in his own person. Busy, determined, crafty, and unwearied in doing evil, we now find him, the third time of his appearance, anxiously tempting the Lord Jesus to yield to his suggestions on some one point, and to be in some instance obedient to him. Whether, when Satan tempted our Lord, he knew the divine nature of the Son of God, whether he was aware that he was engaged in the endeavour to seduce the Almighty Creator of the universe, very God, to pay him obedience, is not told us. There are some reasons to believe that he was in ignorance on this point. Whether, however, he did know this fact or not, his motive is very clear from the nature of the history itself. We may gather from the fact that if our Saviour could have yielded to Satan's temptations, Satan himself would have been no whit the better than he was before, that his object *was merely* to triumph over the obedience of the Son.

of God, and to have brought the Redeemer into a position wherein He would have been in subjection to evil. If on any one point the Saviour had yielded to the solicitations of the tempter, then He would have shewn Himself therein inferior to Satan; He would have done therefore that which would have lessened the value of the Sacrifice; the Lamb would no longer have been "without blemish;" there would have been a spot on the Victim, a taint and a stain; it would not have been acceptable to the purity of the Godhead, and being insufficient for the uprightness of the Majesty on high, the Trinity enthroned, the world would not have been redeemed, the ransom would have been faulty, and the justice of Jehovah would have stood unsatisfied. Doubtless this was a leading reason in Satan's labour, this was the urging motive of his endeavour; it was his heartfelt wish, it was his earnest struggle, it was his crafty scheme that we should have no Redeemer, no Saviour, no hope, no refuge, but that "Hell should enlarge herself, might open her mouth without measure, and that our glory and our multitudes might descend into it^b."

This was the aim and the feeling of that unseen but ever-present being, never wanting in cruelty and craft against man:—"Let them be for ever mine; let me for ever hold them; let me hold them in torments; let them for ever cry in anguish; let me triumph in their sufferings; let me glory over their

^b Isaiah v. 14.

Creator ; let me then arise and remember my cunning ; let me tempt this Jesus ; let me vitiate their redemption, and cast a flaw upon their ransom.' Actuated as he was against us by these bitter, these Satanic feelings, let us now cast a hasty view upon his proceedings in his temptation. Jesus having fasted forty days and forty nights, "was afterwards an hungred." When the tempter came to Him, he said, "If thou be the Son of God, command that these stones be made bread." This temptation was of a two-fold nature. First, it looked towards the bodily condition of our Lord,—“He was an hungred ;” it pointed out to Him a ready way by which His hunger might be satisfied ; a way, moreover, in which no sin appeared, a way which took nothing from any one else,—“command that these stones be made bread.” But the temptation carried also a sort of challenge with it,—“If thou be the Son of God :” it said, in short, ‘I disbelieve that thou art the high and omnipotent Being which thou claimest to be ; I do not credit, I cast aside the notion, that there is any truth in the voice that was heard, and in the claims set forth by yourself, that you are come forth from God ; if you wish to convince me of the truth of your asserted Sonship, command now that these stones be made bread, sustenance for yourself in your hunger.’ Pressed by a double trial, the one an appeal to His bodily wants, the other an attempt upon His supposed pride, our Lord in no point yielded to His insidious enemy. Satan doubtless had but little hope that he

could lead the Lord Christ into any open and gross sin; all he attempted at first, as the most likely method for success, was some small, some trifling deviation from obedience and implicit trust in God. To place His own power under the guidance of Satan would not have been to “do all first to the glory of God :” so also to shew forth His first miracle in order to vindicate His own character would have been rather to set up on high Himself, and not the glory of the eternal and undivided Trinity. The sin, however, was small, subtle, and apparently without any evil consequences. But Christ the Lord, in infinite wisdom, saw that any obedience to Satan, however small, however trifling it might seem, carried with it a departure from obedience to God, a carelessness, if not a looseness, of principle, and He meekly put by the trial in the gentle words, “It is written, Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God.”

The second temptation with which Satan tried our Lord Jesus seemed to apply itself directly to His pride. “The devil taketh Him up into the holy city, and setteth Him on a pinnacle of the temple, and saith unto Him, If thou be the Son of God, cast thyself down : for it is written, He shall give His angels charge concerning Thee, and in their hands they shall bear Thee up, lest at any time Thou dash Thy foot against a stone.” Satan perceived that the Lord answered his temptation by a sentence taken from the Book of God ; on his second trial, therefore, he

himself enforced his temptation by a passage taken also from God's Word, and by a passage, moreover, which, though in this case it was falsely applied, still in its true interpretation bore direct reference to the Lord Jesus Christ.

Now there can be no doubt but that this scripture, had Jesus chosen to obey Satan, and thus to descend through the air from the pinnacle of the temple,—there can be no doubt but the words, if necessary, would have been literally fulfilled. Doubtless the Lord would not have “dashed His foot against a stone.” Supported by His own will, or upborne, as He might choose, by the hands of attending angels, no doubt the Lord would have passed down without injury, and withal without danger. Such a descent must have impressed on the minds of all who saw it the utmost feelings of astonishment and awe; it might be thought that such a spectacle, in the opening ministry of the Lord, would have excited the greatest admiration, and have paved the way for an easy approach to the minds of the people. It would also have been to triumph over natural laws, and would have been a sign, if not a proof, that the creation was the work of His hands, the creature of His omnipotence alone who could thus control every rule in it to His own sudden will and power. But thus to prove His glorious relation with the Almighty Godhead, thus to shew that He came forth from God, to prove in this manner that He was the Lord and the Redeemer of mankind, was not to obey His Father, who sent

Him. It was not the appointed scheme of the Godhead that mankind should be thus convinced ; it was, moreover, the proposition of the devil ; it was not to obey God, it was to obey Satan ; it was to accept his plan ; it was, in so far, to depart from God. Another meek dismissal followed, therefore, this proposition, and our Lord answered the Scripture language of the deceiver by giving him another Scripture text,—“ It is written again, Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God.”

Christ, our Redeemer, was now tried by another and a last temptation. “The devil taketh Him up into an exceeding high mountain, and sheweth Him all the kingdoms of the world, and the glory of them.” It is probable that by some art Satan was able to cause a splendid vision of the glories of this world, and the pomps of the different kingdoms thereof, to pass in array before the eyes of the Lord. It is likely that Satan hoped by this display to awaken either ambition or covetousness, or the love of worldly delights in general, or all these tempers, within the bosom of the Lord Jesus, and this temptation leads us, therefore, strongly to suppose that the devil did not know with whom he had to do. “All these things,” said he, “will I give thee, if thou wilt fall down and worship me.” This promise was, like all the promises of Satan, false throughout. He had not these things to bestow ; they are, and they ever have been, in the hand of the Lord on high, Who alone ordereth and bestoweth them according to His

will and providence. Our Lord, however, did not notice the falsehood of the promise, but only the audacious and impious proposal; and, rising in severity of language, He rebuked His adversary, saying, "Get thee hence, Satan: for it is written, Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and Him only shalt thou serve." At this saying Satan found that his trials were in vain; he found himself laid open and rebuked, and he departed and went his way. "Then the devil leaveth Him, and, behold, angels came and ministered unto Him."

Having now considered the temptation of our Lord, let us endeavour to bring home and apply to ourselves that spiritual instruction which this portion of the Word of God may contain.

It has too often been our own lot to be tempted, and in what may remain of our lives, no doubt the same lot will befall us again. Unlike our Lord, we are found frequently to be the victims of our trials, and our triumphs over our enemy are rare things. The reason is, we do not oppose Satan as Christ opposed him.

When we are pressed by temptation, our usual course is to debate with ourselves whether we will, or whether we will not, enter upon the sinful course proposed to us. We weigh the dangers of discovery; we are, to a certain degree, influenced by our conscience; we say we ought not to do it, it is wrong, it is sinful; then the pleasure, or the advantage of the temptation, comes again before us;

then the debate begins again, 'Shall I, or shall I not?' In this manner the temptation haunts us: at last we begin to be used to it; we do not repel the thought of it; we begin to consider that the sin is a common sin; that many commit it; that it cannot be so very sinful; that it is not likely so many people would do it if it were; that we never can believe that all who commit it will be lost souls: then we say that we need not make a habit of it; we may only commit it once; once will not do much harm either to our own souls or to our neighbour's; God will pardon once.

This, my brethren, was not the way in which our Saviour met temptation. The Lord Christ observed the rule, "Keep thyself pure^c." We rely on ourselves; we find ourselves in danger of falling; sin is urged upon us; we are in danger to yield; we then hold a council:—with whom? With ourselves! We feel weak, we look for strength; but where? At our own hands. Is it wonderful if we fail? Jesus Christ was not weak, was not lacking in counsel, still where did the Lord fall back when the tempter drew near? Even on the "Rock of Truth." Our Lord did not balance the matter, did not, for a moment, consider what to do, when that which was in any degree wrong was proposed unto Him, but He at once opened the Book of God. His answer to temptation was, "This hath God said." There He took His stand, there He found His strength and His support.

^c 1 Tim. v. 22.

Now let us farther enquire why, as we may reasonably suppose, this was the course of the Lord Jesus Christ, the Maker of the worlds. It was not that He stood in need either of the strength, the support, or the wisdom of the Bible. The wisdom of the Bible, the assurances and the guidance of the Word of God, all took their beginning from Him, Christ, reigning in heaven long before He descended for our salvation, had, by His Spirit, poured forth the Scriptures, and had given the wisdom and Word of the Lord unto mankind. But He no doubt turned back to that storehouse of grace, that He might shew us also where to turn our eyes when temptation lies before us. Christ is "our Ensample," and He teaches us in this history, when we are tried by any temptation, not to put our trust in our own wisdom or counsel, but to turn at once to the Word of the Lord; we are instructed to say, 'God hath commanded the contrary,' and on that answer to rest; to weaken it by no additional arguments of our own, to admit no gainsaying, no remarks, no subterfuge, but merely and simply to make answer to the tempter in the words of Christ the Lord, "This hath God said."

Next, let us observe that every answer made by our Lord to Satan was taken from the Book of Deuteronomy. The Book of Deuteronomy was the Book containing the full and final declaration of God's will made by the lawgiver; Christ, therefore, not only sought His answers and His support from

the Word of God, but from that portion of the Word in which His laws were most fully and distinctly written. Now from this we learn, at the least, what follows. The Gospels are the laws of Christ, the enlarged laws of God, addressed and opened to all the world. To the Gospels, then, we are taught to turn when we are assailed by Satan and his temptations; we are taught to say, ‘This and this hath Christ said; this was the example of Christ Jesus; this was His command: I shall obey it, I shall walk after it.’

If we are tempted to be impure, we are taught to look to Christ, He was pure; if to be covetous, He was bountiful; if to be angry, He was patient; if to be malevolent, He was merciful; if boastful, He was humble; if violent, He was gentle; if confident in ourselves, He prayed to God.

My brethren, when Christians are tempted, if they would withstand like Christians, surely they must meet their danger with the laws and with the spirit of the Lord Jesus Christ. They must open the Book, they must look upon its pages, they must not look within themselves. “Out of the heart proceed evil thoughts^d.” We must make our Captain our leader. Weak, short, lamentable, and deficient,—miserably so unto the end,—will be our copy of His most sacred Character; but unless each, after his ability, doth labour, doth strive, doth pray to re-

^d Matt. xv. 19.

semble it, he is no servant of Christ. "He that saith he abideth in Him, ought himself also so to walk even as He walked^e." My brethren, would that those Gospels ever were our first study, and now in particular. Entering on the season of Lent, we begin that period in the year when we ought to prepare our minds a few weeks hence to bow down in awful humiliation when we commemorate the Crucifixion; to return thanks in grateful and hopeful exultation when we celebrate the Resurrection of our Redeemer. Would that this preparation was carried on in strict Gospel study. The more we lived in Gospel reading, the more confident, the more believing should we become. The sacredness, the holiness, the divinity of our Lord would more and more gloriously, still and ever, shine upon our minds. Our hearts would more and more "burn within us;" more and more should we cleave to Him and follow Him; more and more should we be bold in our triumphant cry, "The Lord, He is the God; the Lord, He is the God^f."

My brethren, if we thus read and applied Christ's holy Word, more and more should we be blessed in our study of it. We should grow better within, and as we became more and more deeply imbued with Gospel doctrines, our principles would repel temptation more readily,—instinctively as it were. When sin presented itself, it would call up the answers of

^e 1 John ii. 6.

^f 1 Kings xviii. 39.

a Christian and the defences of grace. Approaching to the promptness of our Redeemer's replies, we should be quick with our Gospel words; guided by them, sustained by them, strengthened and assured, we should, under God, be enabled to hold out unto the end. Time and age would remove many of the temptations of the flesh; habits of obedience, and our victories over ourselves, would weaken all. Daily would our lives become more serene, less vexed with evil; daily, as we drew nearer to an end, would our journey be less and less toilsome. Our end itself would be, what it is meant by Christ's mercy to be, the most welcome part of our existence here. We should look in warm hope unto Jesus Christ. We should be able to say, 'I thank Thee, O Lord, that Thou hast led me to Thy Word. I thank Thee that Thou hast stayed me thereon. I thank Thee that Thou hast comforted me therein. I thank Thee that Thou hast strengthened me in it, so that I have been enabled, through Thee, in some sort to defeat the adversary, and have avoided, in some degree, offence and falling. And now, O Lord, according to Thy mercy, pardon, for Thine own sake, what is shortened in my obedience, what is left undone, what is done ill; and preserve me now, in Thy forgiveness, in the hour of death, and in the day of judgment.'

In some such words, and in such high trust in God, may the obedient Gospel-reader close his eyes, and "fall asleep in the Lord:" uttering such words,

he may end his warfare here, and through the mercies of his Captain, Christ Jesus our Lord, he may go on unto his victory, he may turn his back upon our troubles, and pass away unto his peace; “and the devil shall leave him, and angels shall come and minister unto him,” and bear him to his blessed rest.

SERMON XVIII.

Second Sunday in Lent.

GENESIS xxvii. 34.

He cried with a great and exceeding bitter cry, and said unto his father, Bless me, even me also, O my father.

THESE are the words of Esau. They shew to us his agony when he found that his brother Jacob had stolen away his blessing. The first lesson which the Church of Christ has ordered to be read to-day has told us, that when the end of his life had now come upon Isaac, his wish was to have given his blessing before he left this world to Esau, his first-born son, and that Jacob, his younger brother, came with subtlety and stole it away.

In these days, when there are many worldly men, with cold and hard hearts, some may be found who will say, ‘What was Esau the worse? where was the injury? what was the damage which could make Esau thus cry “with a great and exceeding bitter cry?” was he hurt either in life, limb, or possession, that he had not this blessing? would it have been of any great value to him if he had received it?’ Many a man may be found to speak in this

tone, because the world as it has grown older has not grown more simple or more tender; and a reverend feeling towards our fathers, and the belief and trust that there may be a holiness about their prayers for their children, that God will stoop to hear their blessings, and to grant the mercies which they may beg, in faith, for their sons and their daughters, are scarcer than once they were,—indeed, as matters of belief, are hardly felt at all. Young people now, looking after delights and pleasure, reckon not up and value not the prayers for God's spiritual blessings with which many a parent follows a wild and wilful child; little enquire and little think how they may wound a father's or mother's heart by excesses; ask not how great is the sorrow and the fear which they may plant there; and how anxious, how bitter, and supplicating often against hope, is the prayer which a virtuous father may put up to God for an unworthy child. It was not so, however, before the world was grown old in iniquity. In earlier days, when men were more simple, when they had more lately come forth from the hand of God, and when there was a recollection of the Lord more fresh upon the earth, then it was thought that, when a good, old, and faithful follower of the Lord was about to lay down his load of years and to pass away, his blessing, and his last earthly prayer to Heaven for the peace, the welfare, and the virtuous living of his children, was worth something; and that it carried a comfort and a

value with it long, long after silence had settled for ever upon the lips which had uttered it. It was thought that at such a time a good and an aged man, who had seen the emptiness of this world's vanities, would meekly beseech the Lord to send his children "those things which would be profitable for them ;" that, looking back upon the world he was leaving, and seeing its labours and its unrealities, looking on into the world to come, and seeing the glories of the Lord his God, the eternal peace in the pardon of Jesus Christ, eternal bliss in the service of the Godhead, that he would strive to comprehend the wealth and the vastness of the vision ; that his love would enlarge itself, and his spirit would be poured out in a prayer that God would make his children good, and keep them happy ; that He would teach them to glorify His name upon the earth, and lead them to do good unto mankind ; that He would bring them by easy days into a quiet old age, and conduct them through a peaceful death into forgiveness and peace. It was thought that the God of mercy, Himself a Father that "yearneth" towards all His children, would not be averse to such a prayer at such a time, but that He would "incline His ear to hearken." There was a belief that the compassion of the Lord might flow, and that He might look down in mercy upon a household thus finally entrusted to Him.

These were the thoughts of former days, days which, in many places in this prosperous and worldly

kingdom, are now long gone by. But once no child held it as a light thing, but felt it a privilege and a favour, to have his father's hand spread upon his head, and to hear his prayer,—a prayer always from the bottom of the heart,—that God would protect, and love, and guide his child, and be, more than he could ever be, a Father to him for ever and ever.

These, my brethren, were the thoughts of man when the world was less worldly than it is now : they are my thoughts still, and I hope they are the thoughts of some among you, and that they seem strange and unwelcome to none. If so, then you will know why Esau's cry was exceeding bitter ; you will feel that a sore place was left upon his heart, which never could be healed again so long as he lived upon the earth. However, there was a loss to him, when his blessing had been taken from him "by subtilty." I will endeavour to explain to you what it was, how he lost it, and why it was God's good will that it should be given over to Jacob. Thus I hope I may bring this discourse to some points of consideration which, by God's grace, may be useful to us all.

The birthright had important privileges attached to it. In Exodus xxii. 29 we read that the first-born was consecrated to the Lord : "The first-born of thy sons shalt thou give unto Me." In Genesis xlix. we read that the first-born had a dignity and a pre-eminence attributed to him : "Reuben," says Jacob, when he was dying, "thou

art my first-born, my might, and the beginning of my strength, the excellency of dignity, and the excellency of power^a." In the Second Book of Chronicles, chap. xxi., we read that the first-born succeeded in the government of the family or kingdom: "Jehoshaphat slept with his fathers, and the kingdom he gave to Jehoram, because he was the first-born." But besides these privileges, the first-born in the house of Abraham held the covenant which God had bestowed on that lineage, that from his loins Christ Jesus, after the flesh, should come. The promise that "in the seed of Abraham all the kingdoms of the earth should be blessed," was fixed, in the first place, upon the elder line; and there it would have continued to abide, and to give it a blessed honour and esteem, had the elder line continued to deserve such a sacred distinction.

It is, however, always the pleasure of God to try the faith of His servants; and it is wonderful, and a cause of much prayer and self-examination in a thoughtful mind, when it discovers what very trifling temptations will sometimes prove strong enough to forfeit the privileges, and upset and destroy the religious obedience of any soul, which is not faithfully looking towards God, and seeking His help in prayer.

Esau was a great hunter, and on one occasion he came back from the field hungry and faint. At that

^a Gen. xlix. 3.

particular moment Jacob, his brother, had prepared a dish of pottage; and Esau in his hunger seeing it, said to Jacob, "Feed me, I pray thee, with that same red pottage, for I am faint ^b." Jacob had probably noticed before a careless and worldly temper in Esau, for he said to him, "Sell me this day thy birthright." And Esau said, "Behold, I am at the point to die; and what profit shall this birthright do to me?" And Jacob said, "Swear to me this day; and he swore unto him, and he sold his birthright unto Jacob." Now this traffic in the birthright shews how Jacob esteemed the birthright and its blessings, and how Esau undervalued them. Jacob would not rest till he had bound down his brother's sale under his oath; and Esau had no hesitation in swearing unto him, and in taking a dish of pottage as the price of it. It also shews, what always is shewn, when expediency and present profit are preferred to strict principle. It shewed a plain want of faith in Almighty God.

The promise that from the loins of the first-born of Abraham Shiloh should come, rested at the time upon Esau. He was honoured as the first-born, he had a right to challenge his father's blessing; he was chief over his brethren, and was the first in succession of the covenant. Was it to be thought that this chosen man was really to perish for hunger in an abundant household as that of Isaac was? If

^b. Gen. xxv. 30.

there had been any seeming danger of such an event, did not the knowledge that he stood before the Lord in this favoured posture give him sufficient assurance that he needed not to barter away the special favour of the Lord for a mess of pottage? When Abraham, who was the grandfather of Esau, was promised a son against all the ordinary courses of nature, he believed God's word, because God had said it. Abraham could not tell how it would be God's good pleasure that this promise should be fulfilled, because the event itself was of the nature of a miracle: still, because God had said it, he trusted in it.

When he was farther told that this child was to be the father of a mighty nation, and that in this nation all the earth should be blessed, the event appeared more unlikely still; but the promise was larger, and more gracious, and his gratitude accordingly became larger, and his belief that the promise would come to pass continued, because it was the word of the Lord.

In obedience to the word of the Lord the child is born, it waxes strong, and grows up to the beautiful period of youth. Then came the word of the Lord to Abraham, commanding him to slay this child in sacrifice to the Lord, on the mountains of Moriah. Now this tried his faith to the utmost. 'Could such a command come indeed from God?' would be the first thought; 'Is it not some delusion from the evil one? Is it not some snare to betray me.

to cut short that line, which has been named to be the course wherein the Messiah shall arise? Does it not contradict what God has said? If I slay the child, how shall the mighty nation follow which the Lord has spoken of? How shall the whole earth be blessed in it? Shall I not cut short the blessing, and render it impossible? Is it not, lastly, a great sin to kill? Is it not a still greater sin if a father kill his child? These would be some of the natural arguments which, as a man, would move in the heart of Abraham. But as a father, feelings more tender and more wounding would sorely try him. 'Can I kill my child? Can I bring my hand to slay? Can I be blind to his anxious look for mercy? Can I be deaf to his beloved voice? Will not that glance for ever haunt me? Will not that voice for ever cry in my ears? Must not the next thing I have to do be to rush after him into eternity, to follow, by the same weapon, the same path whereon I have sent him; and so to escape a wretched life of misery and sorrow?' These, we may easily believe, were among the temptations and the arguments which Satan would crowd upon the soul of Abraham; all of them strong, tender, and not unseemly appeals to the human and natural heart. But what was his course? The course of faith, and trust in God! Abraham had but one word, 'It is the will of God, it is the will of God! I see not the wisdom of it; but what am I that I should? I see not the mercy of it; but what am I, and what is mine, that I should keep anything

back which the Lord hath called for? I see not how God's promise can stand if I obey this command; but who am I that I should look to know what be the ways of the Lord God on high? I see not how I can nerve myself to do it, or, having done it, how I can endure it; but it is the will of God! God has a right to my obedience, and He can bring about all that He has said. It is the will of God, and though it is dark to me, yet is this thing clear,—that it is a blessing to my child, and to myself, and, it may be, through us to all mankind, if we meekly take the appointed path, and, to the uttermost, obey.'

In this history we see a heart fearfully tried. Why was it so tried? doubtless to be an example to all men to follow the commandments of God through all things and over all things. Pitiful is the downfall of Esau the grandson. He was hungry, and there stood the dish of pottage: 'Give me to eat,' said he, 'and I will give you God's favour, God's blessing; you shall stand before the Lord in my place; you shall be the selected son, the chosen race, and I will go my ways around the world, and wander through it, will take my chance, and meet my fates without my promises, and without my blessing.' What could bring this about but the most cold carelessness of heart or the most perfect disbelief?

Neither of these graceless tempers, however, dwelt in Jacob. He coveted the blessing; he felt that it

was a real good : and he did that which we mostly all do when we covet, he fell into great sin. Still he had this grace, that he longed to be placed nearer unto the Lord, if by any means he could accomplish it. He had the tempting dish in his hands : he might have sold it at a price ; he might have gained for it something valuable in a worldly point of view ; he might have demanded money, or some of the more costly of Esau's garments, or some of the more useful of his implements or weapons. Esau perhaps would not indeed have given a very high price for his mess ; it is likely that he sold the birthright so readily because he put a very light value upon it ; still, following his hasty and gluttonous appetite, we may believe that he would have given Jacob the full value of his meal. Jacob, however, did not try him. His mind was not set upon worldly gain in this transaction ; he felt that Esau, as the first-born, stood nearer to God than he did ; that he was consecrated to the Lord ; that on him, in the first place, rested the promise of the blessed Redeemer ; that from him was to spring the happiness and the hope of the whole world. He knew that these things had been spoken by the Lord ; he believed them, and he valued them. None of these events might come in his time ; but he said, ' Would that they may come through me, though I be dead, and long since returned to earth in the grave : still, would that this bright chain of sacred mercies may connect itself with me ; would that I may be a connect-

ing link in this great course of God's graciousness to man, and that with me the line of the loving-kindness of the Lord may stand in union from this time forth while the world endureth.'

In this state of feeling we see a wide difference between the state of Esau's heart and that of Jacob. Esau valued not the promises of God, thought lightly of them, very likely disbelieved them; Jacob highly esteemed them, longed to stand in Esau's favoured place, and fully trusted in the fulfilment of the promised mercies of the Lord. It is not, then, very wonderful that God permitted the scheme of Rebekah to take effect and prosper, as the Lesson of this day has related to us; it is not, perhaps, wonderful that God permitted Isaac to be led to transfer his blessing to Jacob. Esau valued it not; Jacob esteemed it highly. Esau had contemptuously sold it for one meal's meat; it was justice to Esau that it should go.

It went: but let us not forget that when Esau discovered that he had lost it, he bewailed it with "a great and an exceeding bitter cry." Frequently we know not the worth of a thing till we have lost it; when we have it no longer, then we lament it; and the more the loss may come of our own bad conduct, the more sorely do we grieve and charge ourselves thereon.

This, then, is the history, as I read it, of the events connected with the first Lesson which the Church of the Lord has ordered to be read to you

this day; and, in fact, it shews also the tempers which led to those events.

In this season of Lent our holy Church has well chosen this chapter, because it is a season when we are, more than in other seasons, called on to deny ourselves, to humble our souls, and to mortify our worldly feelings. The sin which led to the sale of the birthright, and the forfeiture of the blessing, was gluttony; a sin to which a fast is, of course, directly opposed; it is the sin therefore to which, at this season, we ought particularly to turn our self-examination. However, as we well know, a fast is intended to be a season of self-denial in general; and they, therefore, who are abstemious and moderate in diet, are not to consider that Esau's example does not speak to them. All self-indulgence, of whatever kind, which in any degree, however small, puts out of remembrance the fear of God and a reverence for duties, is the tone of mind condemned in the downfall and in the punishment of Esau.

Let me, then, try you on this point. Is not a fast a wise thing? Is it not ordered by a sufficient authority,—the branch of the Church of God built up by Him in these lands? Is it not a holy and a wise appointment, if we are very frail and often fall, that we should have some season especially wherein to search ourselves, and wherein also to practise ourselves in careful walking with God? Is it not, therefore, well to be believed that, in His care for His Church, Christ, the Bridegroom of the bride,

has guided her by the Holy Ghost to set apart this season? Did not the Lord Jesus Christ Himself mortify the flesh and fast? "Are not these things so?"

Now then, my brethren, answer to yourselves, in the same honesty and truth with which you must one day make answer to the Lord in judgment; answer to yourselves, and say what are your fasts. Is there, in truth, any worldly mindedness, of what kind soever, any "gall of bitterness^c," worked out, discovered, and denied? Is there any sin really repented of, prayed against, and struggled against in honest truth? When this fast in the Church of the Lord Jesus comes to be remembered in the judgment-day, will it appear to have been a fast at all? or is it merely a semblance, a deceit, a deceit deceiving only your own selves. "Is it such a fast that I have chosen? Is it to bow down the head as a bulrush, to spread sackcloth and ashes under you^d?" Should not the heart fast and pray, and be rent in repentances?

My brethren, does not the simple but beautiful picture of the Prophet go beyond our observances? The bulrush feels the watery season, bows down her head before the stream, and obeys the impulse. Do we perform as much? do we feel the season? And if we come here and bow down the head, do we obey the impulse? does not the favoured self-indulgence,

^c Acts viii. 23.

^d Isaiah lviii. 5.

whatever it is, still stand in strength, and remain upright in the heart? My brethren, answer to yourselves, because this season is sent upon you for your spiritual improvement. The Church of the Lord Christ appoints it in His Name and under His warrant, and you must answer for it before His throne hereafter.

Next, remember that the fast has now but begun; if it has not begun with any of you as yet in truth, begin it. Esau is called up from the dead this day to warn you; let him not pass before your minds in vain. He was the inheritor of the promises, and we know how it came to pass that the Lord permitted the inheritance to pass away from him,—because he loved the world he lived in more than the world promised; because he esteemed present enjoyment more than future glory. But we also are inheritors of promises; promises more valuable than that of Esau, because his promise spake to him rather of an earthly honour, while ours carries with it the everlasting peace of the Lord Jesus Christ. Esau was “chosen,” was “called,” was “elected” into his position of high promise; and so also are we, as we are assured by St. Paul in his Epistle to the Romans, “called of Jesus Christ,” “beloved of God, called to be saints^e.” But Esau fell away, nevertheless; his race fell away, and, in a worldly sense, they became outcasts: the sin which led to this was indul-

^e Rom. i. 6, 7.

gence of the flesh—worldliness. Tremble then, my brethren, and ask whether the same may not happen again ; whether we may not fall away, whether our sons and our daughters may not fall, and whether the sin which led to such a downfall may not lead to it again, whether it is not very common and powerful amongst us.

My brethren, I press this upon you, because the Church of my Master and my Lord, your Lord and Master, Jesus Christ, commands me to press it on you ; and, if in His grace and mercy towards you it may be, to exact it from you. Lent is the fast ordered by the Church of God, and it is the fast of God. You may slight it, and harden your hearts against its rules, but if you do, I stand sure on God's truth that you thrust aside graces, and that you gather sins into your bosoms. It is well known to all that the flesh commonly, much too commonly, rules the spirit, and overrules it, that the "law in the members^f" is often far too strong for us, always too strong, unless when we are under the guidance of the Spirit of God, and are walking in His strength.

Shall there be no time, then, to ask to what law we are obedient? Shall the very time appointed and set by for the enquiry, and, as needs may be, for repentance,—shall this time be a time neglected, cast away, or elevated in name only to be an observance, and proclaimed, as it were in mockery,

^f Rom. vii. 23.

to be a fast? Is not this to barter the birthright for the mess of pottage? Which of you will so mispend this season, and then repair to the table of the Lord, your Father, and say, "I am Thy son, Thy first-born; bless me, even me also, O my Father?" Will he not find that the end will be what it has been before, "a great and an exceeding bitter cry?"

SERMON XIX.

Third Sunday in Lent.

GENESIS xxxix. 2.

The Lord was with Joseph, and he was a prosperous man.

THE history of Joseph, among all the histories of individual characters, either in the Bible or in any other book, is one of the most remarkable and beautiful which we shall meet with. Perhaps there is no history in the world which shews more clearly the hand of Almighty God governing and arranging the events of this life, so as to bring from them at last the results foreordained by His providence, in the most wonderful, the most unexpected, and the most merciful manner. As the Church now orders us to read this history, and has placed a remarkable instance of Joseph's uprightness of conduct before us to-day, I will enter somewhat into the early portion of Joseph's life, which will bring me to this day's lesson; and I will then, under the aid of God, endeavour to draw from it some instruction useful to ourselves.

Joseph was one of the younger sons of Jacob. As

his youth rendered him in the eyes of his aged father an object of anxious care and more delicate attention, as he was of a beautiful appearance, and as, from his history, we must believe he was of a prudent, upright behaviour, walking under the especial and continued Grace of God, it is not surprising that he became one of the most favoured and beloved sons of the Patriarch Jacob. This circumstance awakened against him the envy and the anger of his brethren. "Now Israel loved Joseph more than all his children, . . . and when his brethren saw that their father loved him more than all his brethren, they hated him, and could not speak peaceably unto him^a." Few courses, no doubt, are more unwise, few more wrong, few more injurious to all parties, especially to the favoured party, than for parents to shew among their children preferences and partialities. The child which is unduly favoured is usually humoured and indulged in foolish or bad habits; he grows to be a torment to himself and to his family; he is allowed to entertain habits and tempers which are likely to disgrace him in this life, and to condemn him in the next; in the common but very true language of the day, he is a child "spoilt."

My brethren, if you will have mercy on your children, train them in humbleness and self-denial, in a low estimate of themselves, in few wants; they will find in this course of life their strength, and their

^a Gen. xxxvii. 3, 4.

wealth, and a very long step towards their piety. My brethren, you must train them up to die! That is the hour, the crowning hour, for which you must prepare them. Let them be lowly-minded under the hand of God; let them know how to deny their wishes, and to love this world little; and when their work is ended, they will come far cleaner out of their toil, and far more ready to leave it. It may be difficult, perhaps hardly possible, for parents to avoid liking one child better than another, because one child will be more amiable, a better child than another; but then this is a call to take the more pains with that which is the least promising; all ought to be made useful in this world, all, to be saved in the next: one that is less hopeful, therefore, requires the more careful guiding. But whatever preference may be felt, none ought to be seen; indeed, the parent should rebuke and check in his own heart preferences and partialities as much as possible. Each child is the gift of God, one as much as the other. Each is to be cherished, protected, advised, admonished, encouraged, rebuked from the same kind and fatherly bosom, with the same earnest prayer and hope that he may grow up to do honour to God's Name, and that he may be useful to mankind.

Every Christian father should have but one trust, one supplication, that he may correct and train his children into holiness. Happy and blessed among men is that father who, when he closes his eyes upon

the world, can bestow his blessing alike upon each child; who, in his last prayer before his death, can offer up his thanksgiving that the Lord has enriched him, has entrusted him with offspring; that upon him has been laid the sweet burden and the beloved charge of a father; that he has gathered his jewels, and has forgotten none; that he has cleansed them, and polished them, so that they may be valuable among men, and may be precious in the sight of God. This father, as he departs, may trust that when he is taken away the Lord Himself will be to them a more wise, a more controlling and a more merciful Father, and that his own labour to make them God's servants will be an acceptable offering, for the sake of Christ.

It does not appear that this impartial and holy conduct was the rule of Jacob's life among his children. In consequence, differences and enmities arose in his household; and it so befel that Joseph, who certainly was the most devout and the most upright of all his children, underwent, on account of this unhappy preference of his father, a very early acquaintance with the most severe sufferings.

The rest of the brethren of Joseph plotted against him to take away his life. At last, when he was sent to them on a message from his father, as they were tending his sheep and herds at a distance from home, they determined to take that opportunity to slay him. Reuben, his elder brother, delayed his immediate death by persuading them to put him down into a

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pit, urging that he might be left to perish through hunger, and that they might be spared the shame and pain of spilling his blood. His real intention was to have come privately afterwards and to have released him. Joseph, accordingly, was stripped of his clothing and was lowered down into the pit. This was hardly done, before a company of Ishmaelites came in sight, who were trading down into Egypt with myrrh and spicery; and Judah, one of the brethren, said, "What profit is it if we slay our brother, and conceal his blood? Come, and let us sell him to the Ishmaelites^b." Reuben at this moment was absent, therefore he could not protect him by any fresh device. Joseph, therefore, was sold to the Ishmaelites for twenty pieces of silver, while his clothing was carried home, and being shewn to his aged father torn, and dipped in the blood of a kid, the unhappy Jacob was led to believe that Joseph had fallen a prey to a wild beast, and "mourned for his son many days."

Such is the history of the events which befel Joseph immediately before we find him in the family of Potiphar. "And Joseph was brought down to Egypt; and Potiphar, an officer of Pharaoh, captain of the guard, an Egyptian, bought him of the hands of the Ishmaelites, which had brought him down thither^c." We now find Joseph in the character of a slave in Egypt, being then a lad of about seven-

^b Gen. xxxvii. 26, 27.

^c Ib. xxxix. 1.

teen years of age. We see in this history one of those wonderful and mysterious arrangements, by means of which it so often pleases the Lord to bring to pass His merciful purposes. It was the gracious purpose of the God of Israel that the house of Jacob should be preserved during the period of a famine, with which it was His will at that time to afflict the earth. In order to bring about this preservation of the sons of Israel, Joseph is sent forward into the land of Egypt, one of the most fruitful soils then in cultivation. This is not done by any miraculous warnings from the Lord, or by any unusual appearances or visitations, but God turned to His own purposes the angry feelings and the envious tempers of Jacob's sons against their favoured brother, and allowed them to sell him as a slave. The Ishmaelites, his purchasers, carry him into Egypt with their other merchandize, and at last he becomes the property of one of the leading noblemen of that land, and an inmate in his house.

In this part of Joseph's history we learn how the Lord will often turn the wickedness of men to His own merciful purposes, a lesson which the Bible in other places also does not fail to shew us. We are also here taught to be patient in affliction, and to have hope in God during evil days. We do not see the end thereof, nor whither the evil times be leading us. Very often wicked men are but bringing about God's mercy. What could appear at this moment more desperate to Joseph than his condition? He was a youth, alone, a stranger, a foreigner, sold for

a slave, exposed to all the tempers of his purchaser, helpless among oppressions and cruelties. Nevertheless this was, in the end, one step towards that high station in which he governed Egypt under Pharaoh, and had the delight and consolation to receive and to sustain both his father Israel and all his brethren. In the house of the Egyptian, his master, it is said "the Lord was with Joseph, and he was a prosperous man^d." We are not told what was the course of good conduct which recommended Joseph particularly to his master, but we may believe that it was God's blessing following all his doings, because he walked before God in prayer, and kept his foot in a diligent, an upright, a prudent, a pure, and a God-fearing path in the sight of the Lord. He cleaved unto the Lord, and so he was in immediate communion with all that was good. This, we may believe, was the reason why he was "prosperous;" it was because he lived under God's blessing, and this naturally led to his master's good-will, and that to his own advancement. Joseph, therefore, found grace in his master's eyes, so that at last he made him overseer over all that he had, and he placed his whole house and all his possessions in the hands of Joseph.

In this advanced situation it pleased the Lord to try him with another temptation. The behaviour of Potiphar's wife, her adulterous desires, her bold and

^d Gen. xxxix. 2.

shameless addresses and invitations, and then her wrath and anger when she was denied, her falsehood when Joseph virtuously refused her and fled from her, Potiphar's belief in her deceitful charge, Joseph's fall from his honourable situation, and his confinement in the prison, are all stated at large in the chapter which the Church orders us to read to-day. I need not, therefore, dwell upon these points. It was a most severe trial of Joseph's constancy; it was another and a very strong appeal to Joseph's trust in God; and we have Joseph now once more in a situation where every means of advance and dignity seem to be cut off for ever.

Nevertheless, such are the unknown ways by which the Lord governs the world, that his disgrace and imprisonment were only fresh approaches and stepping-stones towards that high estate in which he fulfilled the gracious providence of God towards the house of Israel. The same good conduct which had introduced Joseph to the kind notice of Potiphar, his former master, now rendered him a favourite with the keeper of the prison. He was observed to be so trustworthy, so just to all, that at length everything within the prison was committed to his care and keeping. The prisoners were all committed into Joseph's hands, and "whatsoever they did there, he was the doer of it. The keeper of the prison looked not to anything that was under his hands^e." In this

^e Gen. xxxix. 22, 23.

state of trust was Joseph when two of the principal persons in the household of Pharaoh himself, under some charge and offence, came to be confined in the prison. These high officers were placed with the rest, under the care and rule of Joseph. One of them soon afterwards was cleared of his offence, and therefore was released and restored again to his place before Pharaoh; and it was by his recommendation that Joseph also was himself brought out of prison and placed in the king's court, until, finally, he was there promoted, and the whole government of Egypt was placed in his hands, subject only to Pharaoh.

This is, my brethren, a short view of the extraordinary events in the early life of Joseph. Let me now attempt to draw from them some instruction which, by the blessing of God, may help to lead us through upright and God-fearing lives towards our acceptance in the Lord Jesus Christ. Now, beyond doubt, the first thing which the Church of the Lord Jesus would teach us in this history is to remember the rewards which followed the chastity of Joseph. Last Sunday we saw the punishment which befel Esau because he had yielded to his gluttonous appetite, and had sold his birthright for a mess of pottage; this day we see how Joseph was advanced step by step unto greatness and dignity, and how long a step towards them he made, unwittingly, when he resisted the loose desires of his master's wife. This, we must believe, is the first lesson which the Church would, at this season of Lent, especially desire us to keep in mind.

My brethren, in this life of temptation, with every passion carefully solicited towards wrong by Satan, self-denial is the strength of a Christian man; self-denial also is his wealth, because it leaves him wherewith to offer unto God. My brethren, how often in a moment of good and generous feeling has a man said, "Would that I could give this, would that I could bestow that, for some particular good purpose; would that I had the means so far to serve God." Seldom, perhaps, has he asked why he has not the means; seldom has he said, "Were not the means given, but have they not been wasted in vanities or vice?" The Church of Jesus would keep you from these downfalls. She would shew you each sin, one by one, and also how you may avoid it, why you should avoid it, lest you lose God's blessing; and also that you may keep God's blessing, she would have you remember Esau's recklessness when he said, "What profit shall this birthright do to me?" She would have you remember Joseph's firmness, "How can I do this great wickedness, and sin against God?"

This is the first lesson which we are here taught. Next, the case before us seems to bring to our minds in a most striking manner the truth of St. Paul's words, wherein he says that "All things work together for good to them that love God."

This is a point on which I always wish to speak,

¹ Gen. xxv. 32.

² Ib. xxxix. 9.

³ Rom. viii. 28.

and to assure my readers with much boldness. I do not indeed maintain that worldly blessings and great earthly advantages always follow a godly obedience to the Lord Christ as a matter of course, because it is well seen how,—partly no doubt to shew the little worth which the Lord attributes to worldly wealth; partly because the Lord Christ sees also how tempting and how fatal to the soul station and abundance often is; partly, also, to exercise and strengthen patience in a good heart; partly to give thereby examples to a selfish and world-loving age,—it is well seen how, for these and such-like reasons, that the Lord will sometimes try the godly with afflictions, and wean them by denials and difficulties from all love of this world. Nevertheless, I boldly trust that a life governed by the laws of the Gospel of Christ will generally find a blessing following it even here on earth. I believe St. Paul's words to Timothy, one of the first bishops in our Church, to be true in their plain meaning, and that he gave the saint a true and a consoling assurance when he said, "Godliness is profitable unto all things, having the promise of the life that now is, and of that which is to come¹."

That this was the case with Joseph we have seen. He was twice thrown wrongfully into captivity, once as a slave, a second time on a false charge, as a practiser against the virtue of his master's wife. Can any two situations appear more hopeless? A poor

¹ 1 Tim. iv. 8.

youth, despised and a foreigner, and, like every stranger, with no friend. Where did he find his friend? He found his friend in Him who was the most powerful; in Him who was no stranger, but nearest and closest to him, the Lord God Almighty. Does any one believe if he had been, as slaves and prisoners often are, reckless, debased, sinful, that he would have been the head of the household of the captain of the guard? or that he would have been set over all the prisoners who were kept in ward? or, lastly, that he would have been recommended and promoted in Pharaoh's palace, till he became, under the king, the first person in Egypt?

Godliness was Joseph's advancement. In the same manner it may, by the mercy of God, be the advancement of any man. It is God's pleasure and merciful will that good conduct, Christian-like living, religious principles, decent courses, shall always tend to exalt a man even in this life. Try it, my brethren, by one or two examples. See what a quantity of want and distress there is in the world. This may happen, and, as I have said, sometimes does happen, to those who lead good lives, and is sent by the Lord, as was the case with Job, to try their patience and their religion; but how much more often is there want only because there is vanity or wickedness? How often will young men spend their means and wages in loose and dissolute living, and so scatter what they might well put by, till old age finds them poor, in misery, tempted by want, and oppressed by the remem-

brance of a bad life? Now who made this want, a want we may see every day? It was not sent upon them by God the Lord, for the Lord gave strength, skill, and earnings; but it came because Satan whispered, and he was listened to, and when conscience and the spirit within warned, God's word was shut out and unheeded. Many an old man, now in want, can look back to times when he "had enough and to spare;" when temperate living and Christian habits would have enabled him, and would have taught him, to make provision for old age. So also how often may we see vanity in dress, and, what seems to follow from it, love of vain companions; and carelessness and lightness in the choice of friends lead to miserable wants, not want of means alone, but often want of character and station.

These are bitter wants. But who sends them? Why, Satan sends them, and we take them up. If God sends us health, and ability, and rewards for industry, and it is before every man's eyes that God does in the main so order the world; if He commands in His laws frugality, prudence, and temperate living, then very much the most part of our distress is because we disobey these commands; because we take with the one hand and scatter with the other. He cannot have his purse well filled who will still throw away. I will boldly maintain that a very great degree of the want we suffer in this world arises only and entirely because we are not Christian and godly in our lives and conversations. The Lord

God Almighty is the loving Father of all men, and though many a man will be a bad, a rebellious son, till he may come to be an outcast child, yet, through the life of man the heart of the Lord Jesus, both in worldly and in spiritual dealings, leans towards fatherly and tender love to His children.

But if there is to be this reward, godliness must be a rule with us, an abiding thing. This was seen in the godliness of Joseph; it governed him always. When he was a slave, he still kept a heart depending upon God. It might have seemed to him that if he became the favourite of the wife of Potiphar, his situation would have been much amended in that household, but his thought was, "I shall lose God's blessing. I shall turn my back upon the God of my fathers, whom we have worshipped, and whose mercies have followed us since the world began." Accordingly his words are, "How can I do this great wickedness, and sin against God?" So when he was the chief man in all Egypt, under Pharaoh, and his brethren came down "to buy corn," we do not find him relying on his greatness and puffed up with pride, nor does he attempt to triumph over his brethren; his object seems to have been to bring them all down into that land of plenty, and to have the comfort of welcoming there his father and his brother Benjamin; and in his concealment of himself to bring these things about, his description of himself is, "I fear God;" I am not an idolater, nor have I the vain worship of this land wherein I dwell,

but my worship is the same as your worship, I fear God^k.' To sin against God, to defeat the grace of God, to destroy his own godliness, and to lose the comfort and supports which it brought with it, both to body and soul, was, in his mind, a thing not to be thought on.

What is the course of many when temptation approaches them? Do they put it aside as a thing not to be thought about? This is a question which the Church of Christ at this season presses upon you in an especial manner. Do you say, 'I shall lose my godliness, I shall forfeit my peace of conscience, I shall defile my soul, I shall "wound" my Redeemer, I shall "grieve the Holy Spirit of God," I shall "quench grace," I shall give Satan a victory, and I shall exalt sin where I ought to exalt the Cross in my own heart?' Are these the sayings which at once are heard throughout the breadth of Christendom when temptations come up from Satan upon the people? Alas, no! Too often not much of this kind is said; too often the question is, not how wicked is the action, but how is it hidden? Not how disgraceful, how polluting, how contrary to the rule of Christ? but how safe is it, how unseen of man? Many a man will take up the words of Joseph in quite another meaning: 'How,'—in what manner,—'can I do this great wickedness? How can I commit the sin and not be seen by man, never be detected, never punished for it?'

^k Gen. xlii. 18.

My brethren, in the sins which, in self-mortification in Lent, the Church would now especially put within control, how constantly is this the case! in the sins of the flesh, in all vain pleasures, in pride, worldliness of what kind soever, how often the question in the heart is, 'How,' in what manner, 'can I do this wickedness' safest, and 'sin against God?' If this is not the ungodly course of too many, whence can spring up the carelessness about our souls, whence the loose living, whence the wicked indulgences and the vices which the Church always, but now especially, would have us deny, and bring, through Christ's aid, under rule and rebuke? My brethren, if our godliness is not of that firm and abiding kind which ruled in the heart of Joseph, we have not spiritual godliness, nor can we expect worldly or spiritual rewards.

The world and its temptations moved not the heart of Joseph; in spirit he was beyond the world; he was gone forward to his God, and there he was abiding. He could readily descend from a high condition, but he could not do a "great wickedness, and sin against God." We see which was, in his eyes, the greatest reward, a worldly pleasure or a clear conscience. He looked unto the end; he knew that everything in this life is changing and uncertain; he saw friends removed or altered; he saw fortunes shaken or overturned; he saw his own life, day by day, passing away and growing less; he saw the time shortening itself, and the judgment coming, and he turned his eyes on his Father and Protector,

where there was no passing away, no alteration, no change nor reverse; he felt as the Church then felt, still feels, and would have you feel, "Let me stand strong in the Lord."

My brethren, take this example which the Church has this day brought before your eyes. Work, "work together with God." Labour that you may be cleanly, unworldly, upright before the Lord Christ. Live, searching yourselves; live, charging yourselves more and more; live more and more in fear of yourselves, in fear of the Lord; live in prayer for clear sight and for increased strength, so, as life shortens more and more, hope and trust in Jesus Christ may grow more and more. Listen not to those who may tell you that sudden calls and convictions may come upon you by-and-by, and that you may be called, elected into salvation hereafter, though you have lived, and are now living, in contradiction to Christ's warnings. My office, my brethren, is not to diminish, but to extend, according to its unbounded measure, the mercy of God. No doubt a man may be saved by some sudden and powerful act of God's grace, and, if God so please, He may change the heart hereafter, when we should least expect such a change; but to look for these things as future possibilities is very unsafe, it is a temptation from Satan to keep you easy in your sins. Let not your hope of eternal salvation stand on what may be hereafter. But open the Book, take into your bosoms its sober, its convincing lessons; attempt your salvation as you are

there commanded, at once and without delay; look for the reward according as it is promised; be kind one to another; be watchful over yourselves; deny the world, subdue the flesh, "renounce the devil;" daily seek God's forgiveness, daily pray for His aid and guidance. Then, my brethren, the Lord will govern you, now and for ever; then you will obey God; then, also, shall you have trust in Him, and the only trust whereon man, through Christ, can rely.

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SERMON XX.

Fourth Sunday in Lent.

GENESIS xlv. 4.

I am Joseph your brother, whom ye sold into Egypt.

IN the first Lesson which the Church has ordered to be read in the evening service of this day we find great instruction of a spiritual kind. The speech of Joseph, in which he discovers himself to his brethren, enters at once on one point which we may reflect on with great advantage. That point is the fact that the Lord overrules the evil feelings and the sins of man, so as to make the bad movements of our hearts, and the actual vices of a people or of individuals, useful and beneficial, in the end, to mankind at large. The history of Joseph gives us, in a very clear manner, an example how the errors and sins in the household of Jacob were turned by the providence of God into the means of the preservation of the race of Israel.

It is probable that this is always the case. It is likely that the Lord God, in the exercise of His wisdom and power, always makes the crimes of mankind beneficial to the world at large; and though we may not be able always to trace out the course of events, and the dependence of the different changes

in life one on another, with accuracy sufficient to enable us in all cases to state their origins with certainty, still we may well believe that in every case sin is controlled, error and mistake is reduced to right, and that, in the foresight of the Lord, all things are so provided as that good shall arise out of evil, and that sin and the machinations of Satan do universally advance the good of man in the end, and the glory of Almighty God. It is extremely difficult to oppose this opinion, because, if sin does not eventually produce always the good of mankind and the glory of God, then we have much in the world which is not only useless, but hurtful; we have omniscience blinded and omnipotence defeated; we have infinite justice perpetually halting, and infinite mercy always shortened and contradicted: so that he who does not believe that vice is always issuing in the ultimate happiness of the creation, seems to have a less and a meaner notion of the Most High than he ought to derive either from his own common sense or from the blessed Word of God itself.

This history of Joseph is very strong in favour of the doctrine which I have just stated, and partly on that account, partly because it is a very beautiful story in itself, and particularly because the Church lays it before our notice to-day, I will enter more fully into it, in the hope that we may derive from it some of the sacred instruction with which it is richly endowed.

First, we will examine the errors and the sins in

the household of Jacob which led to the history now before us. In this enquiry we shall find that Jacob and his sons are all chargeable, Jacob with an undue preference for Joseph ; his sons with spite and envy against Joseph, because he was the favourite son of their father. Both these things are told us in the Book of God. "Now Israel," it is written, "loved Joseph more than all his children, because he was the son of his old age. . . . And when his brethren saw that their father loved him more than all his brethren, they hated him, and could not speak peaceably unto him^a." This undue fondness for Joseph on the part of Jacob was the beginning of evil, which evil was nevertheless turned to merciful purposes by the foresight and power of the Lord. Sometimes, no doubt, one child will be, in his character and in his life, more deserving of love than another ; one will also be more clever than another, one more kind-hearted than another ; each being sent to us with different tempers and various abilities, will present to us different and various reasons for preference. It may require, indeed it does require, on the part of the parent, great niceness in conduct and a strict sense of justice to prevent this preference from becoming obvious, plain to be seen, and therefore a temptation to lasting jealousies and ill-will, laid in the way of the children before they can judge, and laid in their way by the parent himself. Nothing can be more

^a Gen. xxxvii. 3, 4.

wrong, except open examples of vice, than such preferences displayed and shewn among children as ruling feelings in the parents' breast.

One reflection alone ought to do much towards the correction of so evil a habit. Let the parent remember that each child is sent unto him from the Lord. God entrusts us with every child equally. A soul is created, and is placed in the parents' care; and he is, if he fears God, to labour to the utmost to keep that soul pure and upright in the sight of God; so that whenever the Lord recalls that soul unto Himself, it may return "a child of God," and, by Christ's mercy, an "inheritor of the kingdom of grace." That is one reason, in the infinite mercy of God, why the child was in the beginning created; another reason is, that the child, as long as he is in the world, (be it a long or a short course which is allotted him,) may do good, and while he is upholding the honour of the Lord, he may also be of use and advantage to his brethren in the flesh. Now a parent is bound to do his utmost towards the fulfilment of both these reasons; he is bound to do his best towards the upright and holy training of every child, in order that each may run the course which the mercy and loving-kindness of the Lord hath laid before him. Therefore it follows that if any child is more untoward than another, which will happen, if any shews a more ungainly temper, a quicker turn to wrong and mischief, then that child is to be tended and trained with the more care. In that child the

soul is more weakly and sick, therefore it must be more carefully regarded ; it is not to be cast off, disliked, and neglected, but more is to be done for it, because more is needed, and what is to be done must be done in tenderness, in caution, in daily prayer to God that the parent may be guided right. When the gardener has many trees to train, some here and there will be gnarled and crabbed. They must not be left thus, but every bad bit must be carefully pruned away, good soil must be laid on, and every kindly shoot must be trained forward and protected ; in this way at last the tree will bear fruit, and the gardener's care will be rewarded.

Now this is also, in a far higher degree, every parent's duty. Exactly as the temper of the child may be difficult to manage, so should the parent's labour, watchfulness, tenderness, and prayers for patience and wisdom, be multiplied and continued. Such prayers will be heard, for the Lord does not will, on His part, that the child should be a cast-away. Such prayers will be heard and answered, and a child so tended will begin to shew kind and better points of temper ; some grace will shine out, which may be led along unto good fruit ; the bad disposition will insensibly grow better and better under gracious treatment, the 'crooked' will become 'straight,' and the child, which was likely to be disliked and feared, will come to rank among the 'jewels' of the parent. If Jacob's sons were less amiable than their brother Joseph, then they should have been more carefully

trained by their father; that was, in such a case, the special burden laid on him by the Lord, and such an obedience would have caused good fruits to rise up in his children, and Jacob would have seen, day by day, more to love in all his children; he would have seen more good done by all of them, one with the other; he would have seen more love and peace in his household; God would have been more honoured, and God's blessing would have been more bountifully spread among them all. On these points, my brethren, there can be no doubt at all, so that every parent who shrinks from fulfilling such duties towards his children ought to reckon with himself that he is shrinking from his duty towards them and towards God.

But if Jacob suffered an evil preference for Joseph to appear, still Joseph's brethren ought not therefore to have hated their brother. This was yielding, in a very shameful manner, to the bad tempers in the heart. It was not Joseph's crime that he was more beloved and more tenderly treated by Jacob his father than his other brethren. Most likely, indeed, it was his better conduct which made him a favourite, and there appears no reasonable cause why he should have fallen under their hatred and cruelties. But if their evil tempers were in their hearts without sufficient cause, so also they advanced beyond all measure, and to the utmost amount of sin. Their hatred brought them all into an agreement to murder their brother. My brethren, but for the protection of God

spread over that chosen house, what a crime and what a downfall had they now brought upon themselves. Even in their escape from this fearful bloodshedding, how poor and how sinful is their posture ! They spare their brother only that they may make a price of him. "What profit is there," it is said among them, "if we slay our brother? behold, here are the Ishmaelites, let us sell him to them for a slave, and we shall have a price to divide." It was the love of twenty pieces of silver, and not the love of Joseph, which saved his life. Few scenes shew more baseness, few scenes warn us more strongly against envyings and jealousies; few histories admonish every household in a clearer manner to bear with one another, to love one another, to deal truly with one another, to do good to one another always, than this history of Jacob and his sons.

Such, then, was the misgovernment in the household of Jacob, and such also were the sins which arose out of it. No doubt in part it was permitted, in order that it might stand for ever in Holy Writ as a warning to all fathers to avoid the display of wicked and silly preferences among their children; no doubt, also, it is intended to caution children, if parents are so weak and wrong-headed as to shew more love to one child than another, still never to permit such partialities to weaken them in their love towards the favoured child, but always to deal justly towards him, as well as towards the others, lest envy and bitterness should be cherished against the

favourite, and so sin of the most heinous nature may find an inlet.

Besides this, as I have already stated, it might also be the purpose of God,—while He permitted, through their weakness and sins, that His chosen house should be a warning to mankind in all time to come,—it might be the purpose of God to make their very weaknesses and crimes the means for the display of His providence and power, and thus to confirm our trust in Him by shewing us that sins worked against them that fear God, injustice of whatever kind, may be only the course of events which is to lead them to safety and glory; only the rough places in the road which is faithfully conducting the traveller to his rest, and a higher and more exalted resting-place than he had ever proposed to himself. “The powers of hell cannot prevail against God,” and the movements of sin can be moulded in His hand, till they bring forth nothing but good. Wicked plots, evil tempers, and the hard and foul dealings of bad men, are all beneath the power of the Lord. “Darkness is under His feet^b,” therefore iniquity may be made the foundation whereon He will build up His loving-kindness, and the crooked and hidden paths of unrighteousness may be made suddenly to open upon the mercies of the Lord, to lead him who was plotted against into his peace, and to conduct the plotter into his own confusion.

^b Ps. xviii.

This was, in a wonderful manner, the case in the history of Joseph. Folly began in Jacob; wickedness in Jacob's sons arose out of this folly; injustice in the highest degree was practised against Joseph; severe punishment went the round of the household, visiting both Jacob and his sons; and the rewards of good living and the fear of God attended Joseph, and arose out of the very oppressions which were unjustly laid upon him. "The eyes of the Lord are in every place, beholding the evil and the good^c." Jacob's folly was punished first in the agony which he felt when his son Joseph's garment was brought home to him stained in the blood of the kid, and he was made to believe that his favourite child had been the prey of some wild beast; then, again, when he was compelled to send away Benjamin to the Egyptians, and felt himself likely to lose another favourite son; while throughout the whole history it is easy to see that he was unable to put full trust in his other sons. It is easy to see that he had weakened their affection and respect for himself by the unjust fondness which he had shewn for Joseph, and that he found himself an old man standing in his full household by himself, left alone, as it were, and having no one on whom he could put a full trust and reliance.

His sons were more severely punished. Driven by famine into Egypt, and there received roughly, one

^c Prov. xv. 3.

detained a prisoner, while the rest are sent back again to bring their sole remaining brother; in great distress of mind themselves, and knowing the distress they were about to bring on their father, they rightly attribute their miseries to the wrath of God; their consciences rise up in accusation against them, and they confess one to another that these punishments visit them on account of their unrighteous dealings towards Joseph, in that they saw without regard "the anguish of his soul when he besought them^d" in vain that they would not leave him to perish in the pit, neither sell him as a slave to the Ishmaelites.

In Joseph we see how an upright course and trust in God will, in the end, bear its exceeding great reward. "Keep innocency, for that shall bring a man peace at the last." In what condition soever Joseph found himself, in each and all he clave to the Lord. Whether as a poor slave, or as the ruler in Potiphar's house, whether as a prisoner, or as the ruler, under Pharaoh, of the kingdom of Egypt, he felt that he stood constantly in want of the help of the Lord, therefore he turned his eyes to God, and leant on Him always in prayer; he would not be separated from the Lord, but he followed God in his life according to his power, he truly and faithfully strove always to obey God; he says of himself, "I fear God^e." That was his description of his own

^d Gen. xlii. 21.

^e Ib. xlii. 18.

heart. Accordingly, he was not forsaken ; the Lord saw his humble piety, heard his prayers, looked down upon his upright and obedient life, and upheld and comforted him, and at length raised him to one of the highest stations in the then known world.

This was the course of events which, with many very affecting incidents, followed the weakness and the sins in Jacob's house, and blessed also the holy and true life of Joseph. But in this history there is still more to be seen. The Lord not only controlled the sinfulness and folly of Joseph's brethren and of Jacob, so as to punish them and to exalt Joseph, He also made this wickedness the foundation, as it were, of the preservation of that chosen race, and turned these workings of Satan in the hearts of this peculiar and adopted line into the means for its preservation. "The famine was sore in the land." Why there was a famine we are not told, but probably it was sent partly as a punishment then, as it is sometimes now sent, on a wicked world. It was needful also to preserve the chosen line in which the Saviour had been promised. Therefore, while the sins in that house are made to stand as warnings to mankind in all future time, and while they bring punishment down on the guilty household, they are also made to be stepping-stones into that land of plenty wherein He was to preserve Israel His people, in which the Blessing of all mankind was in due time to be raised up. Joseph tenderly explains this all-wise and merciful control of the Lord, exercised over all the evil de-

vices of the children of Jacob. "I am Joseph your brother, whom ye sold into Egypt," said he. "Now, therefore, be not grieved nor angry with yourselves that ye sold me hither, for God did send me before you to preserve life. For these two years hath the famine been in the land, and yet there are five years, in the which there are neither earing nor harvest. And God hath sent me before you to preserve you a posterity in the earth, and to save your lives by a great deliverance. So now it was not you that sent me hither, but God^f." All this, we may well believe, was said by Joseph in tenderness towards his brethren, and to lighten the fear and the self-rebuke with which they were overwhelmed when they knew their brother, and "were troubled at his presence." No doubt Joseph, in goodness of heart and in tender love towards them all, "on whom his bowels did yearn," invented this excuse for their evil conduct towards him, and pressed it upon them for their comfort. But in his invention no doubt also he lighted on the exact truth; no doubt, whether wittingly or unwittingly, he shewed forth the movements which had passed through the Bosom of the Lord; whether in the Spirit or out of the Spirit I cannot tell, but no doubt he spake what had been the mercy and the foresight of the Lord, and told with perfect plainness and truth the objects for which it pleased God to overrule the sinful dealings

^f Gen. xlv. 4—8.

of the brethren, so as to bring from their sin, together with a heavy disgrace upon themselves, the blessing and the preservation of the chosen lineage.

One lesson which runs upon the surface of this history is, that when we take a wicked course we are going into confusion. The Lord may, and we may well believe will, draw some great and possibly general good out of our evil way ; and we may even live to see it, and perhaps may be made instruments unintentionally to bring it about : but we shall reap confusion and punishment. Good may be brought to spring up out of our wickedness which we neither looked for nor meant ; but on us will fall the trouble and disgrace which attends wickedness, and which wickedness deserves.

Jacob in his favouritism, in his undue fondness for Joseph, took a wrong course ; he was unwise ; he was unfaithful to God as regarded his duties to his other children ; and we may believe he was unjust towards them. His troubles were multiplied upon him. The Lord, in His providence, rendered this favouritism the first step in the preservation of the lineage of Israel, but towards Jacob it was the first step towards his punishment. The agony which he felt for Joseph, the heavy, the appalling doubtfulness with which he evidently heard the proposals of his other sons, the fear and grief with which he parted with Benjamin, all shew us the trouble of his soul, and that he had lost due control and respect among the other ten sons ; that they resented

his fondness for one; and, as they felt themselves less beloved, so they were less obedient and affectionate in return. The Lord God overruled his sin, till, in His wisdom, He made it bring forth the safety of his household; but, in His justice, He suffered the sin also to bear its natural fruit, sorrow and disgrace; and these evils He mingled, for a long and sore season, in the daily bread of Jacob.

The same lesson also is taught us in the sons of Jacob. They were led by their envy into the greatest sins against their brother: these sins were controlled by the Lord, and turned to the preservation of the sinful brethren themselves, yet upon them they brought dismay, agony of spirit, deep sorrows and disgraces. We may well believe that such will always be the Will of the Lord; because thus, mercy and justice are united. It is just that the wicked should suffer confusion, heart-rendings, fear, and disgrace, but the mercy of the Lord God is well pleased to draw out of their deeds blessings and good to the rest of the world. My brethren, then, take home with you this conclusion out of the Lesson which the Church reads to you to-day. Whenever you enter on any sinful course, though in a matter which seems very small, even if it is only shewing a partiality for an amiable child, then say, 'I am doing an evil thing, and, accordingly, I am going into confusion: confusion here on earth, it may be confusion for ever beyond the grave. The Lord may, very likely will, turn my wrong doings into blessings, but

they will not bless me; to me the evil tree which I am planting will bring forth evil fruits,—that will be my lot,—it is what I deserve, and it will be my portion.’

There is another lesson beside taught us in this history, which likewise lies on the surface of it, and though there are many more, it is the last which I shall now look for.

We are taught to “keep innocency, for that shall bring a man peace at the last^s.” Joseph clave unto the Lord, and he was not forsaken. When he was lowered down into the pit we may imagine the bitterness of the time; but, no doubt, he felt that we can never have a joyful resurrection until first we die out of this troubled world, and he bowed down his head to God’s will and to death, trusting thereby to go on into God’s mercy. When he was sold into slavery, and was taken away from his brethren, no doubt he felt that the will of God had laid more burdens on him before his release came, and he girded up his mind in patience that he might obey. His obedience failed not, and when it brought him once more into captivity, still he clave unto the Lord, and “the Lord was with Joseph, and he was a prosperous man.” He passed under God’s hand through the prison unto Pharaoh’s court, and became the preserver of the line of Jacob.

My brethren, obedience may lead us also through

dark passages, through heavy, through bitter and fearful times : but cast not therefore obedience away; she leadeth unto peace. More than this, she speaks peace to us even in our griefs. Like Joseph, gird up the spirit to obey; you may put your trust in the Lord that you will reap good fruit. Consider if we walk through dark passages, if we suffer sorrows and sore denials, what do we deserve but these things? Have we not been disobedient? Is it not well, then, to take the contrary course? Only obey, and hope shall begin. “ My son, hast thou sinned? Do so no more, but ask pardon for thy former sins^h. ” It may be necessary for many of us that our minds may be cleansed by many trials, and weaned from this world by many griefs. Griefs may follow us through life, and in sorrow we may have to go down into the grave, but the dark passages of the grave will end in the light of heaven, in “ the day-spring from on high,” if we carry into our tombs hearts obedient unto God.

These seem to be two plain lessons, easily to be drawn from the chapter which the Church orders to-day. Guided of the Holy Spirit, she teaches them, that you may receive them. Take them, then, my brethren, into your hearts, and, with prayer for God’s help, obey.

^h Ecclus. xxi. 1.

SERMON XXI.

Fifth Sunday in Lent.

EXODUS v. 2.

And Pharaoh said, Who is the Lord that I should obey His voice to let Israel go? I know not the Lord, neither will I let Israel go.

THIS is the first answer which Pharaoh, king of Egypt, gave to Moses when he was petitioned to let the Jews go out of Egypt into the wilderness to hold a feast unto the Lord. The answer is a denial at once. It also states as plainly that Pharaoh “knew not the Lord.” To our ears the words of Pharaoh sound very daring, and in a manner blasphemous. If we heard a person saying, ‘Who is the Lord? I know not the Lord, neither will I do the commandments of the Lord,’ we should straightway consider him as a blasphemous man, full of sin.

This, however, was not the spirit in which King Pharaoh spake. He merely meant to say, ‘I am ignorant altogether who the Lord Jehovah is; why, therefore, should I obey the commands of a God whom I know not? I shall not send away all my Hebrew slaves out of my country, and lose their labour, because you tell me that a God of whom I

have never heard before has ordered me to do so. I know not the Lord, neither will I let Israel go.' This is the meaning of Pharaoh's answer, and it is only the answer of the common sense of an unenlightened man. Pharaoh, indeed, was not altogether blameless in his ignorance of the Lord. He ought to have known, at least in a general way, what was the religion, what were the rites and habits of his subjects the Hebrews; they had become a numerous race in Egypt. If he had been a careful king, and if he wished to be an upright ruler over all his people, he would have learned the belief and the customs of so very considerable a population; and if he had fulfilled this duty, then, as is often the case, more good would have flowed in unto him from the fulfilling it than he had ever looked for. Because a knowledge of the Lord God would have visited him; and Pharaoh, who was one of the greatest monarchs of the world, might have received what I suppose to be the greatest blessing in the world, a tender heart in his high estate, a heart filled with the "fear of the Lord," while he was anxiously working under God to spread the glory of the Lord over his dominions, to bring his people under the laws of God, and to gain the protection and the blessing of God upon every soul over whom he reigned, by leading them within the peace and the pureness of the Word of the Lord. This might have been his holy labour. His heart might have kindled more and more with hope and joy as he drew nearer and nearer with his

people unto the Lord Jehovah. In this way he might have been still making those, over whom the Lord had set him, more perfect and more pure; and when his hour came, and his head could no longer bear the crown, he might have closed his eyes upon his godly labours, and fallen asleep with words approaching that sacred triumph, "I have been faithful over a few things^a,"—"Of them which Thou gavest me have I lost none^b!" Like all the rest of the world, this King had his duties to perform, and he ought to have considered, and to have "enquired diligently," not, how he could go through them in a manner the most easy to himself, but how he could do the most good to those who were "committed to his charge." Now the path was set open, and Pharaoh might have walked in this course; and it seems that a full sense of his royal duties would have placed him thereon. "The Lord was in that place, and he knew it not^c." And he appears blameable, in that he kept himself in such ignorance as to be able to say, "I know not the Lord!"

We see, then, that Pharaoh was not blasphemous in these words, he was only blameably ignorant. Pharaoh had religion as far as he knew; there can be no doubt but he worshipped the false gods of his own land, Apis and Osiris. And we must not think that this, though it was entirely a false worship, began without some show of reasoning, without

^a Matt. xxv. 21.^b John xviii. 9.^c Gen. xxviii. 16.

some plea for it. Osiris, who was the chief idol of Egypt, is supposed to have been either Misraim the son of Ham, or Ham himself, called also Ammon, who was the son of Noah. Ham the son of Noah is considered to have been the first ruler in Egypt; it is held that he settled the kingdom there; he is believed to have established mild and sensible laws, such as, we may suppose, he would have learnt from Noah himself. It is said that he first gave that people the knowledge of cultivating the country, and of gaining from the enriching waters of the Nile the wonderful crops which are still gathered there. These benefits led the people to make him their ruler, and when he died, they believed that his soul still presided over and ruled them; and thus they came to pray unto him, and to worship him; so that in their veneration for him they departed from their traditionary faith in the true God, and blindly made him their God. This is thought to have been the beginning of that multifarious idolatry which overspread and darkened the land of Egypt.

Now when Pharaoh reigned, this idolatry had stood for a long time: the nation had grown rich by their skill in tillage; it was, moreover, peaceful and strong by good laws; so that Pharaoh, seeing these blessings, was contented to believe that the idol Osiris was a god of a sufficient power to protect Egypt, and did not disturb himself to seek after a worship more true or a God more pure. This

seems to have been the probable state of Pharaoh's mind when he said, "Who is the Lord that I should obey Him?"

Now it has always been in the wisdom and great mercy of the Lord to us, who live in these latter ages of the world, that He hath so preserved the different histories in the Old Testament, as to render them most instructive lessons to us Christians.

The Jews were Pharaoh's slaves; and by their labours they ministered to his royal pomps, his power, his wealth, or his pleasures. Pharaoh did not choose to dismiss these useful bondmen, and to lose their services on the command of some God whom he knew not; they ministered to his worldly appetites, and he would not give them up at the bidding of an unknown God. Now, I believe no one reads this history without condemning the King; but this only shews how very rare a course self-examination is.

If we, taking the Gospels in our hands as Christians, look carefully at what passes in the Christian world, and at what is written in the Book; if, which is far better, we look on the Book and on our own hearts, we shall too often find the same determination not to give up what ministers to our worldly gratification, and this determination resting, not indeed on the same, but on a greater impiety of temper. My brethren, why is there any sin in the Christian world? Why is Christ's flock spotted and stained, wandering, and often being lost? Why are

there all the miseries, the wants, the broken hearts and the shortened days, the daunted hopes and the despairing deaths which sin so often brings upon us? Why are there these wretched endings to the days of many,—these perplexities, these dark and terrifying visions which haunt so many a departing soul? These are things which ought not to be within the fold of the Lord Jesus Christ. Christianity has been given in grace to us before many others, Christ has been preached to us, that we might have peace in this world, love one another, hope all through life, hope stronger and stronger as life grows shorter, and “joy in believing” when the last hour comes. This is what Christianity ought to bestow on this side the grave. Why, then, does she not bestow these blessings upon us? Is she weak? No! Is she false? No! Is she of earth? No! Is she deserted of the Lord? No, not so! She bestows not these spiritual blessings in the plenty that she might, because we, like Pharaoh, though she is amongst us, do not seek after her. Like the Egyptian, we have our objects which we will not give up. Many of the troubles which harass and perplex our lives, and all the miseries which burden our consciences, come from this same temper; we have things which we will not give up.

Whatever wicked passion any one indulges, that goes to swell the quantity of evil in the world. If we must have wealth, there will be griping, and over-reaching, and hard-heartedness to get it. If we

will have wicked pleasure, there must be the ministers to the pleasure, there must be the pollutions, the recklessness of heart, the degradations of the soul, and the denials of Christ which mark those who minister to him in vice. If we will have about our poor bodies undue pomps, there must be the undue labour, the injurious toil,—in this land must I not say, the injurious, perhaps the killing, toil of infancy itself? Where some are to be unduly grand, others must unduly work: and yet we have all these things very shamefully abundant in a Christian land; and only because we will not give up! Christ commands us to “love one another.” He commands us, “Love not the world^d ;” Seek not these wicked and ensnaring vanities, Ask not for things which cannot be gained but by exposing the ministers thereof to vice; we are enjoined to bring, as far as each can, the world unto the Lord Jesus; to let life be more equal amongst us, and more easy; not to make demands, nor to seek for delights and vanities, which must entangle souls in temptations and sins, before we can have them. The command is, “Let this people serve Me,”—not thee: and many, many in this Christian land make answer, “No! I will not let them go!”

Now let us call to mind that to oppose Christ, and to thwart His purposes among His people, is a far heavier sin in us than it was in Pharaoh. Pharaoh

^d 1 John ii. 15.

knew not the God of Israel; and when he heard of Him, I suppose he despised Him. He considered Him only as the God of some of the slaves in his dominions. He believed those to be great and powerful gods who presided over glorious and great kingdoms; and when he saw the splendours of Egypt, all the wealth and power of his land, then he thought that his god Osiris must be a god of great strength to protect him, and of great wealth to bless him, and we may well believe that he worshipped him, as he had been taught, with a thankful and an exulting heart. But when he heard of the God of the Hebrews his first thought would be, 'If this is a God at all, it is some weak and defeated spirit, who cannot exalt His people and His worshippers out of bondage: this is not the God for the King of Egypt to obey.' This would be King Pharaoh's language, and as he was taught no better, it was very natural language. But with us the God of Israel is not appearing as a weak and a defeated spirit. He hath graciously set up Himself on high; He is the God of the land; He is the God of a land far more glorious, more worthy and powerful than ever was Egypt; He is a God whose name, wherever it has been spread abroad upon the earth, has brought with it the blessings of purer laws, more enlightened minds, and amended hearts; He is the only God who has proved Himself to be the true God, not by worldly wealth, though that is not withheld, but by the more spiritual feeling and by

the purer hearts which have sprung up wherever His laws have been accepted and obeyed. We cannot say, "I know not the Lord;" nor can we ask the question, "Who is the Lord?"

When we oppose ourselves to the laws of the God of Israel on any point, we do not oppose a God of whom we have heard but little or nothing; but we oppose the God of our country, and of our fathers; the God of our childhood, and of our early education; the God in whom we trusted with all our hearts when we were young and pure, the God whom we know to be the true God; we oppose Him whose graces we can yet remember, when in our early days they comforted our hearts, before they were given to worldliness and sin. We can still look back to those innocent times, and recollect what a pure joy, what a confiding warmth of heart we had, what an undoubting trust, when we thought of the Lord, when we put up our early prayers to Him, and in full faith, with an unrepublishing conscience, felt that we were His children.

My brethren, Osiris bestowed not on the heart of Pharaoh these rich, these true feelings of a religious heart, because he was not a god, but a dumb idol, "the work of men's hands." Osiris never bestowed such feelings upon the heart of Pharaoh; nevertheless, Pharaoh, because he knew no better, was true to him, and paid him honour and worship.

We must all acknowledge that our knowledge of the Lord is abundant, may be more and more abundant. What the shortness of our true worship may be, what the smallness of our obedience, what the poor-ness of our devotion, every man's heart may testify to himself at present, may teach him, and may correct him, while on this side the grave; it must testify hereafter before Christ his Judge, and then may have to testify against him and to condemn him.

I will now only notice one thing more; and that shall be the consideration that a religion, if sincere, though founded on many errors, still is permitted by the mercy of the Lord to bear many comforts to the worshipper; which comforts are denied to the cold-hearted and careless worshipper, though he be even received and baptized into the true and undoubted Church of Christ itself. Pharaoh, we may believe, was sincere as far as he knew; he worshipped an idol, an image, the work of man's hand, wood and stone, and no God. But still he worshipped. "The stock of a tree to which he bowed down," to which he offered incense, to which he prayed; the senseless figure to which he sung praises and poured forth his thanksgiving; the semblance of the poor animal before which he prostrated his royal person, and laid aside his glory, told forth his confessions, and besought the forgiveness of his sins,—this dumb image felt nothing, saw nothing, heard nothing of the humbled monarch before itself; knew nothing of the wants, of the sins, of the fears, or the hopes of

the King in his humiliations and prayers. But still the King believed that he knew. If any evils befel himself or his kingdom, he thought his prayers were not heard; that his failings, whatever they might be, had been seen, and that his offerings and his petitions were not acceptable. Feeling this, the King would humble himself still more, would bow down his heart to a lower frame, and bend himself to a deeper contrition. So, also, if any happiness followed these mistaken worshippings of Pharaoh, then would he believe that his god had accepted him, had received his supplications, had overlooked his sins; his heart would be lightened of its burden, and he would be filled with joy and thanksgiving. Though his worship was altogether empty, silly, absurd in our eyes, as far as the idol was concerned with it; though it was pouring out religious services to mere emptiness and nothing, still the heart that poured them forth was itself in some part of a religious temper, and some of the chastened feelings of such a temper would be produced in it by this mistaken exercise. It might now be humbled to confession and repentance; now it might be exalted to hope and gratitude; it might feel, in its false belief, as if it prayed to a true God, though in truth it prayed to no God; and thus the heart of Pharaoh, even out of his idolatrous worship, might draw to himself some goodness, and could be made better, in that he prayed.

Now this proves to us what a blessing religion is

to man since even out of a false worship some great benefit and strength may be obtained, and in the most mistaken prayers; if the prayers are true, and according to our light, it would seem as if, by the mercy of the Lord, the voice of the idolater passed by the idol on the altar, was heard by the God, Who searcheth all hearts, and that some comforts and supports were bestowed in answer.

Now this, we may imagine, was the condition of Pharaoh's worship, though he prayed before a senseless image, and though he said, and in his ignorance truly said, "Who is the Lord that I should obey His Word?"

Now what is our condition when we refuse to "obey the voice of the Lord?" Very different from that of Pharaoh, and far worse. He could have some religious feeling, some comforts, some hopes in his poor worship, because, poor though it was, there was in him the spirit of devotion. When we turn away from the Lord Christ, we can have none. My brethren, "Whom have we in heaven but Him^f?" We are not in a dark and doubtful worship as the heathen were. We know that, when for this world's sake we put Christ aside, we put all aside. When a Christian, for the sake of any sin, puts Christ out of his heart, he has no God; he is without God in the world, he wanders in the dark, there is none to lead him, for he has quenched the

^f Ps. lxxiii. 25.

light; he knows the evil chances of the world; he knows his weakness; he is in fear, but he can look for no help; he would beseech the Lord for many things, but the thought comes, 'My sins, my sins; will the Lord hearken?'

Is there not many a soul which feels these doubts and fears? Are there not many to say, 'Have I any longer a place for my prayers before the throne?' How often, when he who has denied Christ would beseech the Lord to have mercy upon him in his trials, how often is his approach to the mercy-seat stopped short, how often are his words made cold, his heart deadened by the question, 'Can such a one as I be heard? is not this trial, is not this sorrow rather the beginning of my punishment than another recal? is not wrath gone forth from God?' Is there not many a sinner who feels and trembles when he finds that, when Christ is left, there is none other to flee unto; "that there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved" ?"

When we come to the end of Pharaoh's history, and see him overwhelmed in the Red Sea, we all consider him as rightly punished, and we seem to feel that he has passed away unto his condemnation. "We know not, God knoweth." But this we know, that if we say, "I will not obey the voice of the Lord,"—and in practice many say it,—then we know

that our condemnation will be deeper than his. Our call is clearer; we know the Lord; therefore if we sin, our sin is greater; if we are punished, our punishment is greater, for it is more deserved. These thoughts seem to be given to us by the Lesson ordered by the Church to-day, when we weigh ourselves and the King of Egypt in the balance of God's Word.

To end all, let us remember that Pharaoh, before he was cut off, had many plagues, and that every plague was a call on him to fear God and to obey the Lord. "He knew not the Lord;" but the Lord, by His mighty power and His outstretched arm, was making Himself known. Howbeit, Pharaoh hardened his heart; as it is written, "When he saw that there was respite, he hardened his heart, and hearkened not^b;" "He hardened his heart, and would not let the people go." Again, "when Pharaoh saw that the rain, and the hail, and the thunders were ceased, he sinned yet more, and hardened his heart, he and his servantsⁱ." The Lord was speaking unto him, but he stopped his ears, till his "destruction came upon him unawares^k." In like manner, let every one of us remember, if he is in any trouble, that then he is under an especial call. Sin may make doubt, or even despair, look reasonable; Satan may urge such feelings upon you; but if you are in grief, be very sure that you are then in

^b Exod. viii. 15.ⁱ Ib. ix. 34.^k Ps. xxxv. 8.

God's correction. Take the caution, "Wherefore then do ye harden your hearts, as Pharaoh and the Egyptians hardened their hearts, when God had wrought wonderfully among them¹?" My brethren, troubles come forth from the providence of God; there is no chance in the world; everything is sent: take it, then, as what you deserve; take it in all humility as a punishment; take it, as better than you deserve, with all thankfulness; take it as another call to walk in the fear of God, and to strengthen by prayer your faith and obedience. Pharaoh's hardened heart has been remembered in God's Word, that hearts now may be hardened no more; the King of Egypt's overthrow is recollected, that now the true children of Israel, the new Jerusalem may be saved. This is the great lesson which the Church would teach her people to-day, and she requires you to accept it.

But, my brethren, how many a sinner is there who has felt as yet no plague, with whom God still deals gently, and whom Christ would as yet win back only with His love? My brethren, shall this man still go on to wound the Redeemer? shall he turn the abundance of the Lord's mercy into a reason why he will insult them the more? in the riches of Christ's loving-kindness shall he seek for a spear to pierce His side again? My brethren, such sinners there are; men who turn God's goodness

¹ 1 Sam. vi. 6.

to themselves into an encouragement to transgress God's laws, and who build up pomps and vanities, pride, love of the world, riotous and wasteful living, licentiousness, sins of many kinds, who build up these things on the abundance of the mercies wherewith they have been blessed. Surely they must repent, as it were in sackcloth and ashes, or they shall receive "the greater damnation ^m."

^m James iii. 1.

SERMON XXII.

Sixth Sunday in Lent.

EXODUS ix. 12.

And the Lord hardened the heart of Pharaoh, and he hearkened not unto them; as the Lord had spoken unto Moses.

“THE Lord hardened Pharaoh’s heart;” these words may require to be explained. It may seem to some that Pharaoh was doomed unto his downfall by the Lord our God; that he was one marked and fated for destruction, and that God hindered his obedience, and kept him back from any place of grace, by hardening his heart of His own divine will; so that Pharaoh was brought into punishment because first he was hardened to sin by the Lord God. Now this is far from being a right view of the case, and it would be to contradict Gospel teaching; therefore explanation may be necessary; and the more so, as we are now come to the Sunday immediately before Good Friday, the day on which we commemorate the sacrifice of Himself which our Lord and Maker Jesus Christ then offered up before the Godhead, that

justice might be appeased by a sufficient atonement, and that in Him all mankind might be saved. I will therefore enter on the consideration of this text, which the Church has ordered us to hear to-day, with a wish to shew to you that it contains nothing whatever which should lead us to believe that Pharaoh's destruction arose out of anything but his own sins.

Now, no doubt, when any one with little learning, and without much leisure for thought,—which is the case of most men,—when such a man reads the Bible, even though he reads with prayer and a sincere heart, portions will meet his eye which may seem difficult for him to understand. This is not wonderful, because it is the case with every other book which treats on important matters; and it is rendered less wonderful when we remember that the Bible is a translation, and a translation out of works written in difficult languages. Moreover, these words were written some three thousand years ago and more, and the latest books translated are now more than seventeen hundred years old. So that two things have happened which render such translations more hard to be understood: the fashions and habits of the people, which are mentioned, are the habits of foreign and distant nations; and in many cases those nations are wiped out, their fashions are either changed or lost altogether: and therefore such sentences as may relate to these points are only to be understood aright by those who have searched out their meaning thoroughly,

and are well acquainted with ancient histories, and with the modes of living, acting, and thinking which prevailed among nations now long since passed away.

These remarks apply to any hard passages in the Bible which may relate to men living in distant lands and very many ages ago. But there are other considerations which apply with greater truth to any passages which may relate to the Lord God. We can only know the nature of the Lord as far as He has revealed Himself to us, and this the Lord has not seen fit to do perfectly. Indeed, we are taught that we shall not be able to have a right knowledge of the Lord till we arrive at another state of being, when "we shall see Him as He is^a." It is probable that we are not able to comprehend the nature of the Lord in this our present state, even if it was told unto us; or perhaps that knowledge, while "it is too great for man to attain unto^b," may also be more than the soul can bear if it was laid open before us; at any rate we know that it has seemed good to the Lord always in some sort to keep Himself veiled from the eye of man. But this would not be the case if it was good for man to see into the nature of God.

When Moses asked the Lord what was His name, the Lord did not even tell him so much as that; the Lord merely declared Himself eternal

^a 1 John iii. 2.

^b Psalm cxxxix. 6.

and self-existent, "I am that I AM." When God described Himself farther, it pleased Him in reality to explain His nature not one jot more than He had done before: He only said, "I am the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob;" "I am the same God that they worshipped." When Moses besought the Lord to shew Himself to His servant, the Lord consented not, but said only that He would pass by, still so clothed in darkness that Moses could only glimpse the back of the Lord, as He went forth from Moses^c.

"No man hath seen God at any time^d," and of an eternal and self-existent God our minds can form no adequate thoughts, so that the Lord God is unto us a mystery; and all the sentences in the Bible, except so far as the Lord intends to make Himself better known unto us, all the sentences in the Bible which relate unto the nature of the Lord, are liable of course to be dark sayings in our ears. These thoughts will make every man conscious that now, while in this life, whenever he would turn his thoughts upon the nature of the Lord, he "sees through a glass darkly," and knows only in part; so that he will wait patiently for the time when he "shall see face to face, and shall know, even as He is known^e." He will remember in his heart, and will obey the wise words of the

^c Exod. xxxiii. 23.^d John i. 18.^e 1 Cor. xiii. 12.

writer of the Book of Ecclesiasticus, and will pray that he may keep his mind employed only on thoughts which "be profitable for him." "Seek not out the things that are above thy strength; but what is commanded thee, think thereupon with reverence; for it is not needful for thee to see with thine eyes the things that are in secret¹."

I will now give a few instances to shew that many difficult places in the Bible seem hard only from the reason that in some cases the customs of the people spoken of are different from our own: in some cases also these customs have now passed away; in some cases, meanings of words were not exactly understood by the translators, and therefore have not been exactly rendered in our own language; and in some cases, where a hard part is found, it has been overlooked that there is often in the Bible another passage which will explain it; and in such cases the one part must be put beside the other, in order to get at the exact meaning. This will bring us to the text read in the Lesson to-day; and we shall then see that there is nothing hard or difficult in it. Now to shew that, in some cases, our manners and customs are so different from those of the Eastern nations as to make some statements which we read in the Bible appear difficult and strange, I will notice one transaction which is told us in the second chapter of St. Mark, which

¹ Ecclus. iii. 21, 22.

will be sufficient to explain my meaning on this point. In that chapter we read of a man sick of the palsy, whom his friends wished to bring unto the Lord Jesus, that He should heal him. But "they could not come nigh unto Jesus for the press," so "they uncovered the roof where He was, and let down the bed whereon the sick of the palsy lay^s." Now this appears to us a very extraordinary, if not an incredible, mode of proceeding. But it will appear neither wonderful nor hard to be believed, when we come to know that the houses of the Jews were only one story high; that they had always flat roofs, whereon the inhabitants in that sultry country were used to walk in the cool of the evening for air; that these flat roofs had each a trap-door to admit people up and down with ease; and a staircase also usually, on the outside of the house, ascended to the roof; so that people, inside or outside the house, could easily go up and down at pleasure. Now a house built in this manner would readily admit the friends of the palsied man to carry up their sick companion, and also to let him down through the roof at the feet of Jesus; which, as houses are built in England, would seem quite out of the question.

In the next place, it is well known that in some cases also our beautiful translation of the Bible—which is as excellent and as true as human learning can make it—does not, in all cases, give us the exact

sense of the ancient Hebrew; and so has, in consequence, produced some few difficulties which would not otherwise have been found in our Bible. An example of this is seen in the Psalms of David, particularly in the 109th, wherein David, according to our translation, is made to curse his enemies in language which seems very contrary to the piety and humility of a good man's heart. But this objection disappears at once, when we learn that, in the original tongue, what we have translated as curses, are in reality prophecies; so that David is not cursing his enemies, but is foretelling the evils which their wickedness will bring upon them; he is not wishing them mischiefs and destruction, but he is foretelling the punishment which the justice of the Lord will bring upon them, and on unrighteous men in general. In short, the expression, to be rightly rendered, should be altered a little; instead of "let it be so," it should stand, "it will be so;" and then we get at the right meaning of the passages in question, and we see that they have in them nothing which disagrees with either the tenor of the Old Testament or the Gospels, but that they are only such warnings and admonitions as befit any righteous man, trusting in God, to utter.

Another way in which a humble Christian will satisfy his mind, when he meets with hard places in Holy Writ, will be to compare those places with other passages in God's Word, with a view to reconcile them, as far as possible, if there seem to be

disagreements, and to bring them into uniformity of doctrine. We may be quite sure that when the books in the Bible were placed in the sacred canon, they were understood to be in agreement with one another, not in opposition, so that, in all fairness, this spirit of agreement should be sought for before all things. You will understand this rule better if I give one or two examples. In the fourteenth chapter of St. Luke we have from our Saviour Christ the following saying: "If any man come to Me, and hate not his father, and mother, and wife, and children, and brethren, and sisters, yea, and his own life also, he cannot be My disciple^b." Now the meaning of this verse clearly is, that we should love God and His Gospel better than all things, however near and dear to us. It is not intended to teach us that, in order to be Christians, we must hate our fathers, and mothers, and all our dearest relations, because the whole course of the Gospels teach us to abound in love to all men, even to our enemies; because, moreover, we are commanded specially to "honour our father and mother;" because our Lord sets an example of the duty of obedience and willing service to parents, in that He Himself "became subject unto His parentsⁱ;" and lastly, because St. Paul declares that "If any provide not for his own, and specially for those of his own house, he hath denied the faith, and is worse than an infidel^k."

^b Luke xiv. 26.

ⁱ Luke ii. 51.

^k 1 Tim. v. 8.

It is clear, then, that it is not intended that we are to hate our parents and all our relations in order to be good Christians, but that we must prefer the Word, and "the truth as it is in Jesus," before these close connexions if they are in opposition to each other; and when these words were spoken they were in opposition. Then the Jews and Gentiles each opposed the Gospel of the Lord Jesus, so that a believer could not come to Christ unless he had turned away from these near relations; and this is all the force that the word 'hate' in that text ought to carry. All which is made more plain when we remember that, in order to be Christ's disciples, we are required to hate "our own life also." Now this only means that we so far hate it, in comparison with the Gospel, as to be ready to give it up, and, if needs be, to surrender it willingly; because one reason of coming to Christ would be to save the soul, and to gain eternal life; therefore hatred of life is not taught us in this passage, but only a readiness to relinquish worldly existence for a life with Christ in heaven. This is the more evident also when we call to mind that the followers of Christ were many of them martyred by unbelievers, and that it was often necessary for them either to lay down life or to deny Christ.

In the same manner we must interpret another statement given us by the Lord Jesus Christ, and which we read in the sixth chapter of St. Matthew's Gospel: "Take no thought for the morrow,

for the morrow shall take thought for the things of itself¹." Now if this text is compared with the general language of the Bible, we shall see at once that it is to be understood with some abatement, and that we are not commanded to leave all things to chance, to live without prudence, foresight, or care, and to make no provision for ourselves or our families, because in many places we are commanded the very contrary. We are expressly taught to be diligent in our callings, "not to be slothful in business^m;" and St. Paul himself lays it down as a rule, that they "who would not work should not eatⁿ." It is plain, therefore, that our Lord's words mean only that we should not be over-anxious about the things of this world; that in providing for ourselves and our families, we should not suffer our cares to shut out religious feelings, or to shorten religious duties; but that we should seek first "God and His righteousness;" that in prayer we should always, and at all times, commit every worldly care into the hands of the Lord, and do our duty first to God, and secondly to man; that neither "to-day" nor "to-morrow" should rule our minds, but that in the cares and duties of each, the Lord should be our "ruler and guide," and that we should place all our doings in obedience to Him, "under His feet."

So also in the Lord's Prayer, that prayer which

¹ Matt. vi. 34.

^m Rom. xii. 11.

ⁿ 2 Thess. iii. 10.

is to be used of all Christians to the end of all time, we find the petition, "Lead us not into temptation." Now here it is manifest that the meaning is, 'Suffer us not to be led into temptation;' 'Prevent us from being led into temptation;' 'Let not temptation be too strong for us, but "with the temptation also make a way to escape";' or, as it is expressed in one of our collects, keep us "from all evil thoughts which may assault and hurt the soul." This is the intended meaning, because you will see that it is impossible that our Lord Christ could mean us to understand that "our Father which is in heaven" would wilfully lead His helpless children into temptations, that it is His plan to decoy us into dangers, and to set downfalls in our course before us; because, if we compare other parts of the Bible with this, we find that our gracious Lord Himself has warned us that temptations arise upon us out of our own negligence and carelessness; He enjoins upon us that we "watch and pray lest we enter into temptation^p," not lest we be led into temptation; we are commanded in effect to "flee temptation," to avoid all places, all occasions, all kinds and modes of temptation under which we may find ourselves liable to fall. Now all this is useless and vain teaching, if we are to suppose that we are led of God the Lord into temptations which we cannot flee from, and are forced into spiritual dangers by the irresistible power of God.

^o 1 Cor. x. 13.

^p Matt. xxvi. 41.

These thoughts lead us to consider the words of my text, and also suggest the rule by which to add to them any explanation which they may seem to require. We are told that "the Lord hardened Pharaoh's heart, and he hearkened not unto them, as the Lord had spoken by Moses." This text has not escaped the notice of those who would scoff at the Word of God, or who would teach disbelief of it. They have said that this account of the dealings of the Lord with the heart of Pharaoh cannot be true, because it represents the Lord as guilty of an act of very high and great injustice; it represents God, first as hardening the heart of Pharaoh, and then as punishing him because it was hard; and then the conclusion is drawn, that if this history is false there is no certainty as to the truth of the rest of the Bible. Now, indeed, if the fact was as this objector states it, we should allow that we could not believe that the Scriptures were the Word of God, because they would then represent the Lord as acting in a way which we should condemn as unjust and cruel even "in men like ourselves." To oblige a being weaker than ourselves, and depending entirely upon ourselves, to commit any particular act, and then to punish him because he had committed it, is of course to commit a far greater sin ourselves. We should be, in that case, the author of the sin which our victim committed, because he did it under our compulsion, and we should add to that sin the sins also of cruelty and injustice, on account of the

punishment wherewith we had visited his compulsory obedience to our vicious power. And as Pharaoh's afflictions, in consequence of his hardened heart, were of the very severest kind, so our sin against him would be of the most flagrant nature. We should say, therefore, and with a truth beyond any gainsaying, that a book which contained such a description of the dealings of the merciful, the upright, and the sin-hating God, the tender and loving Father of all that He hath made, could not be a true description of our Maker and our Redeemer. If the Bible told us that man could not act of his own accord, could not do "as liketh him best," with respect to all his actions; if it told us that he could not find out the difference between right and wrong, or that he was "led into temptations" which he could not withstand, and was compelled into actions which he could not avoid; that "his heart was hardened" by a force which he could not oppose; and that then he was hurried into wickedness which he had no strength to avoid, and that the power which forced these sins upon him then punished him for ever because he could not escape them; if the Bible told us these strange things, then every man would have the best reason to hold it to be a Book of 'idle tales:' because it would degrade the glorious God into an arbitrary and unjust tyrant, and it would make man a mere machine; it would make prayer an empty and an unreasonable service, it would make the Commandments a useless code,

it would make sin the act of God committed by His victim, it would make redemption from sin mostly a fallacy, and the general promises of pardon on repentance and amendment to be plain falsehoods.

Now this would be a consequence if we were to take the text literally, and accept the disbeliever's reading of it, that God purposely hardened Pharaoh's heart, in order that the King of Egypt might be guilty of disobedience to God's will, and might then suffer a dreadful punishment because he had disobeyed it. A slight attention, however, to the general meaning of Scripture, and a recollection of a few of its particular declarations, will convince us that the words are not to be so taken; but that they mean what is expressly said in the eighth chapter of this Book of Exodus, when it is written that "Pharaoh hardened his heart at this time also," that is, as he had done on other occasions, "and that he would not let Israel go." Here we see, not that the Almighty, but that Pharaoh himself hardened his own heart; we see that the violence of his character and his covetous disposition got the better of those good resolutions which he had made, when the plagues were actually upon him and upon his country; and, as is very common, pride revived when fear abated, and that his hardness of heart was his own work, and was not sent upon him by God the Lord. That this was the case is expressly told us in another place; it is said, "But when Pharaoh saw there was respite, he hardened his

heart, and hearkened not unto them, as the Lord had said ^q.” That this history was thus understood in early times is clear from the text in the first Book of the Prophet Samuel, where it is written, “Wherefore then do ye harden your hearts, as the Egyptians and Pharaoh hardened their hearts ^r?”

Nor in these readings let us fear lest we seem to make contradictory statements to arise in Holy Writ. Both texts, that which states that “the Lord hardened Pharaoh’s heart,” and that which shews us that “Pharaoh hardened his own heart,” both will agree very easily together, and with the universal teaching of the Bible also. We are told that after the children of Israel had multiplied exceedingly, and when Joseph had died, that “there arose up a new king over Egypt, which knew not Joseph ^s ;” and that this king plotted against Israel and made them his slaves. He was led to do this injustice from a love of profit,—their labour was a gain to him; and it was enforced upon them with great strictness. We are told that “the Egyptians made the children of Israel to serve with rigour, and they made their lives bitter, with hard bondage in mortar, and in brick, and in all manner of service in the field; all their service wherein they made them serve was with rigour.” This was the manner in which King Pharaoh, who tells us in another place that “he knew not the Lord,” treated the Israelites.

^q Exod. viii. 15.

^r 1 Sam. vi. 6.

^s Exod. i. 8.

Now here we have it explained to us how he “hardened his own heart.” It was a gain to him to have these Hebrews toiling for him without wages; he had a profit when they tilled the ground for him, and when they built for him his treasure-cities,—vast magazines, probably, in which he stored his grain and other wealth. These works were an advantage to him, and accordingly, as “he knew not the Lord,” he exacted them with rigour. Mammon, worldly wealth, was his god, and he stopped at no injustice in his worship. His oppressions multiplied upon the Israelites as their numbers multiplied; he reckoned what he could derive from their labours, and his heart grew hard, “he hardened his heart.”

Now, as regards the Holy Spirit of the Lord, how can we think that God “hardened his heart also?” The sense in which these words are to be understood is as follows. The Spirit of the Lord more and more withdrew from the heart of Pharaoh, as the King became more and more worldly and cruel towards the Hebrews. Good feelings, righteous movements, merciful thoughts towards the children of Israel grew fainter and fainter as his love of profit grew keener and keener. Graces were stifled, the heart of the King became more and more the ‘natural heart,’ ‘a stony heart’[†]; as the Spirit of God withdrew, tenderness, loving-kindness, charity, fatherly care for the people withdrew, and his heart grew harder. We are

[†] Ezek. xi. 19.

warned that the “ Spirit will not for ever strive with man^u ;” we may sin till we banish grace, till we “ quench the Spirit^x,” till we are left to ourselves ; then we have hard hearts : and in this sense, and in this sense only, are we to believe that the “ Lord hardened Pharaoh’s heart.” When his breast was full of sin, the Lord God departed from him, and he remained—what he had made himself—hard. In all this there is a warning. We, my brethren, may banish grace, we may harden our hearts, till we deny the Lord so often that He withdraws from us. Then our hearts also will be hardened, both by our own evil work, and by the departure of the graces of the Holy Spirit of the Lord ; and no injustice will be done unto us, as none was done unto Pharaoh. We cannot look to be allowed for ever to sin without suffering the consequences of sin ; we cannot expect that if we continually make our own breasts more and more unfit for the Lord to abide therein, that the Lord will continually abide ; we must expect that He will arise and depart away, and that He will leave us to ourselves, and to the hardness of the ‘ natural heart.’ Every one of us has his sin,—some evil bias of mind, which may, and if unchecked, will, grow upon us ; and as it increases by little and little, so by degrees the Spirit of the Lord, grieved and wearied more and more, will leave us. This is the way in which all lost

^u Gen. vi. 3.

^x 1 Thess. v. 19.

sinners commonly work against the Lord for their own downfall. My brethren, there is a warning from our Lord which ought to wake with us every morning, and never should rest till we fall asleep at night,—“Watch, and pray.” Pharaoh followed his own heart, left it uncorrected, and fulfilled the desires thereof; he was drowned in the mighty waters. We may walk in his steps, and leave our hearts worldly, proud, wilful, or careless; and if we do, the example of the King of Egypt will be made manifest in us, for we have before us “the sea of fire.”

SERMON XXIII.

Easter Sunday.

ROMANS vi. 8.

Now if we be dead with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with Him.

THE words of my text, which are taken from the Second Lesson for this day's service, contain a very clear intimation, indeed a direct conditional promise, of a future state of existence with the Lord Christ in heaven. The certainty of a future life after death all Christians have considered to be confirmed by the death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus. Indeed, the doctrine of a future life is so frequently and so fully stated in the Gospels, the promise of immortality is so often and so boldly made, that, coupling these statements and promises with the return of our Lord to life after His death on the cross, we must either reject the Gospels altogether as inspired books, or we must accept the doctrine of a future life without reserve.

This firm belief in another and that an eternal life, is one of the great differences between the ancient heathen world and the present Church built up by Christ. The heathens indeed anciently, though they were uninstructed by any direct revelations

from the Lord, could not but fervently hope that there was a life hereafter. "They knew not God^a," and therefore they knew not to a certainty that hereafter they would be called to pass into another world. Still there was a natural, an unborn hope, that there might be another life after this. It is possible that this had been traditionary from the earliest times; but however that may be, we see occasionally in the writings of their wisest and best men that there was an ardent wish, "a longing after immortality," a fervent, I might almost say a faithful, expectation that death would not be the end of all things.

The subtle Greek found many ingenious reasons why he might look on to an existence after the grave; he could not readily bring himself to believe that the destruction of the flesh, the baser part, would, as a matter of necessity, destroy the spirit also; a spirit which was so superior as to feel independent of the body; a spirit which was at once the director, the preserver, and the governor of the body, and which, when it has fulfilled these functions day by day, could then in a manner leave the body out of thought, and go on into other thoughts, calculations, and enquiries in which the mere body could take no concern at all. That this spirit must die because the body wherein it dwelt would die, did not seem to the Greek to be by any means a fixed and necessary truth. So also the proud Roman would

^a 1 Thess. iv. 5.

not believe that his inflexible mind must sink into nothing when a weak body decayed. Death seemed to him more as a person leaving his house,—the soul leaving the body,—than as the total and inevitable destruction of both. The habit of embalming the dead by the Egyptians probably comprehended the idea of keeping the body in readiness for the return of the soul at the resurrection. In less civilized races we find the same belief; and a heaven of eternal revelry, boundless hunting-fields with the never-ending sport, and perpetual wars with never-failing victories, formed the imaginary but the well-believed rewards of eternity which awaited the brave and the upright among our Scandinavian and Teutonic forefathers. In short, to every reflecting heathen the soul had always appeared so widely distinguished by superior faculties from the fleshly tenement in which it dwelt, that a strong and lively hope, I may say a fond and cherished expectation, was entertained by the wise, and was accepted by the uninformed, that another and a better world would receive after death the upright soul, and that *there* would be his peaceful dwelling-place for ever.

We may well believe that this hope, this light, was permitted by the mercy of God to spread abroad, and to cheer the darkness of the heathen world. Doubtless this warm expectation was kept alive in the hearts of the virtuous but spiritually unenlightened heathens, to comfort them in their toilsome journey through a darkened, a hard, and a wicked world,

and to hold out to them, if not a promise, still a soothing and a strong probability that beyond the grave there was a life of peace, virtue, and happiness without end.

Moreover, these hopes of a future life proved a great blessing to the heathens. They assisted, more than any thing, in preserving what little morality the world contained. They gave to teachers of character and eminence the power to enforce the doctrine of good living by the hope of an everlasting reward when this life had ended. This expectation also gave terror to law and to earthly punishment by threatening disgrace and perpetual punishment in the world to come.

But if this hope of another life, this unassured expectation of immortality, could conduce so much to keep a darkened world in some degree of rule and happiness; if the slight glimmering of the truth of God could guide the uncertain world into some, though a very shortened, amount of moral living and comfort; what may we not suppose would happen when the full light of the Gospel arose upon benighted man, and shewed him that the eternal resting-place which he was vainly enquiring after in the errors of darkness, was both secured to him for a certainty, and was also close at hand? How great may we not suppose his satisfaction, how ready, how careful his acceptance, how joyful his gratitude, how firm his belief, when every hope which his ingenuity had prompted, every calculation which his reason

had warranted, every wish which his love of life had awakened, every prayer for immortality which he had ventured to utter, were at length assured to him, promised and confirmed by God Himself.

As soon as this great doctrine had really made its way upon the world, the rushing of the nations towards it was "as the rushing of mighty waters." The Church, from her foundation in the apostles, was so fully impressed with the truth of a future life, was so thankful for this inestimable revelation, was so convinced of the blessedness of the promise, and saw so clearly how unutterably deplorable the loss of it would be, that there was nothing, literally nothing, which could make them, as a body, surrender this doctrine again. When the first bishops of the Church of Christ, the holy apostles, were called of God into this glorious certainty, brought from a state of darkness into light, from hope unsatisfied into knowledge, it seemed to them that all this world was dross, "so that they might win" the world to come. They saw heaven, that "kingdom of God" which they had doubted of, and Christ reigning therein, now assured to them, and, as it were, at hand. Their sole feeling was to press forward, and enter the unfolded gate. They thought not how they might linger here, but how they might hasten thither; how they might "press toward the mark for the prize of their high calling^b;" how widely they might proclaim their

^b Phil. iii. 14.

Saviour's offer; how, by faith, they might strengthen themselves in their Redeemer; how, by gentleness, by purity, by singleness of heart, they might obtain the high reward themselves through Christ, and might lead forward mankind to share it with them. The early Christian converts were tried "as silver is tried in the fire;" they were persecuted by every variety of cruelty, and almost on every pretence, but we constantly see them firm in faith, their hearts upheld, and they are not found turning back. This world, they had learned, was not their abiding place, and they were not unwilling to leave it for that world which was. They feared not death, their only thought was to die well; to die "with Christ," because then they knew that so they should "live with Him."

My brethren, this bold, this determined spirit of obedience to the Gospel of the Lord God, arose upon the knowledge, the full assurance, of another life beyond the grave, a life in the peace of heaven and in the presence of God. This knowledge compelled the holy apostles, who under Christ founded our Church, this compelled their immediate followers to seek only that whether they died or whether they lived, they might "be dead with Christ," knowing then "that hereafter they should live with Him." What is it, then, to be "dead with Christ?" In our Catechism we are taught that when we are admitted into the Church of the Lord Christ by Baptism we undergo a "death unto sin," we "renounce the world, the flesh, and the devil." This is one prac-

tical meaning of the words "being dead with Christ." Christ was dead unto sin : in every other course the Lord Jesus was full of life and labour. In benevolence of every sort, whether we look to His readiness in healing the sick, in feeding the hungry, in giving sight to the blind ; whether we regard His constant teaching, His explanations of the Word of God ; His diligence and earnestness in advancing Gospel doctrines,—or His firmness, when we look to His courageous but peaceful conduct in opposing the errors of those in power,—or His devotion, when we consider His nights spent in prayer,—or any the parts of His character which have been recorded, the Lord Christ could in none be said to be in any way dead. But towards sin He was indeed in every way dead. Towards sin His mind felt no movement ; His heart had no pulse ; pure, spotless, and innocent as He passed through the world, no temptation ever awakened an answer within His bosom. His heart was "dead unto sin and alive unto righteousness."

But can we, with every effort on our part ; can we, with the most earnest prayers for God's grace, with the firmest faith in God's promises, with the most honest endeavour and the most sincere struggles to overcome the flesh, can we hope to be "dead indeed unto sin," even as Christ the Lord was dead ? No, my brethren, assuredly not. Still we must make Christ our example. We must strive to make ourselves like unto Him, to restore as much as we can the image of God in our hearts : we must not make

ourselves "after the fashion of a man;" and if we ask in what particulars, the answer is, we must deny the heart of man within us. If the love of wealth, if gold is an idol, we must remember that in this respect Christ's heart was dead. If "evil concupiscence," if the love of any worldly pleasure or vanity is indulged, permitted, or even excused, here we must remember the Lord Christ felt not, but condemned. In ambition, if the wish to surpass another, if envy, if repining at the higher or the happier condition of another, finds any place in our bosoms, here we must remember that Christ's heart in these points was dead.

So if, on the other hand, we feel any unwillingness to do a kind or charitable action; if we shrink from any labour or trouble in doing a friendly, perhaps a homely office; if we think it beneath us, and would humble us unfitly, then we must remember that here we are dead where Christ was alive. Good actions are never low, but are the highest deeds which we can perform. They are the "will of God;" they were unto Christ as that which did sustain Him; "His meat was to do the will of Him that sent Him." If it would take up our time, or put us to expense to do good, and so we leave it undone, here we die where Christ lived. Blessed is that man before whose hand the Lord layeth his work; blessed is he if he ariseth to do it; it is a holy estate to be servant of the Lord.

So if an enemy offend us, and we forgive not, if

our enemy want help, and we withhold it, here our heart dies, where the heart of our Lord Christ was quick and active.

So, if our heart is faint in religious duties, if prayer becomes irksome, if self-searching is too painful, if humbleness is cast forth, then we are not alive where Christ was alive, nor is our heart dead where the heart of the Lord died.

These may seem hard sayings, and we may ask, "Lord, are these things so?" To lead pure, harmless lives; to be ready to assist even them who oppose us, or who despitefully treat us; to give time, labour, help, or money to those who may thank us for neither, but seek only how they may take more; to keep the body under, to deny its bad passions, to humble its pride; to live pure, even-minded, lowly, and peaceful lives in a world which practises none of these things, but is rather contentious, proud, vain, unclean, and greedy; and not only so, but is full of excuses also for those who follow these well-beaten paths; if this is to die with Christ, these be hard lessons: and if this is to put off the old man, and to follow the Lord, if this is to be of the flock of the Shepherd, how shall we be numbered among the obedient?

Surely, my brethren, the grace of God is sufficient for us if we thwart it not. If we seek the help of the Lord in true and earnest prayer; if we obey every good movement in our minds, and every warning to turn from sin as they are graciously sent unto us,

then are we not only “dead with Christ,” but we then also live with Christ, “rising again unto righteousness.” We shall find that we are more and more leaving the world, that we are more and more in communion with Christ; and this blessed estate will enlarge itself more and more; evil desires will grow weaker and weaker; evil temper after evil temper will wane away as the Light that enlighteneth the world more and more ariseth upon us; and as we go forward towards our last resting-place, we shall be more prepared to “lay us down in peace and take our rest, for the Lord will make us dwell in safety^c.”

This not only may be done, but in the Church of Christ often has been done. When Christ had ascended up into heaven, and had left His followers on earth, a few humble and insignificant persons only; when the whole Christian flock could be reckoned in a scanty number, and not one of them of any weight or importance in the world, what was it which made them to spread and flourish over the face of the whole earth? what was it that multiplied the faithful till they are like the sand on the seashore for multitude? How did this small number, like the grain of mustard-seed, “which is the smallest of all seeds,” spread till it had become a mighty plant, so that now all kindreds of people repose under its shadow, and the Word of the Lord is a shelter to the nations? How did this happen, but

^c Ps. iv. 9.

by a willing obedience to the gracious movements of the Spirit of God? In the early history of the Church of Christ we hear of little but the persecutions which the Christians endured from their heathen enemies; we hear how they were cut off from among the living, how they were burnt, sawn asunder, cast to wild beasts, beheaded or crucified by unbelievers; yet in the midst of all these persecutions, one remark was common in the mouths of their persecutors,—“See how these Christians live!” So pure were their lives, so harmless, so kind, so just, that while their enemies were busy in destroying them, they could not but acknowledge their godly lives. How was this brought about, but by obeying the gracious movements of the Spirit of God within their hearts? They were “dead unto the world, but alive unto God through Jesus Christ.” They upheld the Word of God because they were the willing servants of God; they suffered gladly, because suffering led them out of the world, to which they were dead, and because they had a sure hope that it brought them unto Christ. We are not called upon thus to testify unto the death for the Lord’s sake; and I suppose it is of the mercy of God towards us that we are not so tried, because the Church of the Lord Christ seems to me to be far more soft and delicate than she was; nevertheless, it is in the same spirit that we must be dead with Christ, if, indeed, die with Christ we will. If we pray to God to guide us, to enlighten our minds

in His law, to help us to control our evil passions, God will hearken. The Lord will assist us to throw off the burden of the flesh, if we are in truth willing to throw it off; the Spirit of God will visit us, comfort us, and strengthen us, if we will obey the Spirit indeed, when He cometh unto us.

My brethren, if Christendom was indeed thus "dead with Christ" unto this world, how different would be the record which "in that day" it would have to answer! How much bitterness of soul would then be abated and dead! What clamour, what revilings, what unholy efforts after this world's wealth would be abandoned! What over-reaching, what deceits, would be laid aside! What lusting after base pleasures, what intemperance, what concupiscence would be mortified! The most charitable heart, if it looks abroad into the world in the mildest temper, will find many instances in which, if all those who call themselves Christians were indeed dead with Christ, many, very many of all these things would have to be forsaken in tears. My brethren, what shall we find, if every man did that which is safe and profitable for the soul to do; I mean, if every soul looked within? Shall we find, each one within himself, a heart "dead with Christ?" Have we each the firm trust which ruled the bosoms of the first Christians, that now, if we were called away, we should, through Christ's atonement, live with God?

Perhaps one remark will answer this question. How very many of the small number of Christ's Church

now gathered together in this house of God do, as a matter of course, turn away from the table of the Lord, this day and so frequently spread before them ! What is the reason given by those who retire ? They usually say, "I am not prepared." Now I am far from proposing that any wilful or wicked soul should rashly approach the table of the Lord ; but what is the meaning of the answer, "I am not prepared ?" The meaning is, that some evil habit is still preferred and cherished ; that the flesh is as yet the master ; that Satan is still the God. The man is prepared to follow his own bent ; whatever his sin is, he is prepared to follow it : he is prepared to be unclean ; he is prepared to be intemperate ; he is prepared, perhaps, to be dishonest ; he is prepared to be wrathful, envious, or slanderous ; but he is not prepared to meet Jesus Christ. In saying this of ourselves, I am not saying more than may be said of any congregation ; would to God it were confined to one ! but in every congregation how few go up to the altar of God "in remembrance of Christ," and usually with the same reason, "I am not prepared to lead a holy life in future !" Is this, my brethren, to "be dead with Christ ?" Who, then, is the God in all such cases ? Surely, if we desert God to obey, to serve some sin, that sin, be it what it may, is our god, that is our worship, and to that we sacrifice ourselves. What is our reward ? Why, "the wages of sin is death^d !"

^d Rom. vi. 23.

I have now, my brethren, endeavoured to lay before you some marks by which you may know whether you are dead unto sin, either as Christ Jesus the Lord was dead, or, if you shrink from that comparison, as the early Christians were dead. You may think that these are severe tests, but are they not Scriptural? To be dead, as Christ was dead, unto sin, we must have our heart, towards every temptation, cold, inanimate, senseless. It ought not to make answer, it ought not to throb; like a dead thing, it ought to wither and fade when vice approaches it. I have said that with many Christians I think this is not the case. Now if I am in any case right, to that soul I have to repeat, what Christ's ministers so often must repeat, that for that soul the pit yawneth before her feet; and that the only way to escape her destruction, and to be taken into Christ's forgiveness, is through the deepest repentance and the sincerest prayer.

Repentance, repentance that, under God, doth forsake sin, is a severe work to a sinful heart,—so severe that it will not be persevered in but by the grace and aid of the Lord. How is this to be obtained? Only by true and fervent prayer. It is prayer that knocketh at the gate of heaven; and it is to prayer that, in His mercy, Christ will open. A proud heart does not like to pray, but it must bend and bow down; where a proud man's heart is alive and active, there Christ's heart was dead. A wicked heart does not like to pray; it must give up *its sin*: grace will not come into a heart where sin

dwells; the Comforter will not enter in unto him "that harbours an unclean spirit," and that loves to keep it. But, thanks be to God, repentance and earnest prayers can cast it out; and if this is truly attempted, if Satan is honestly resisted for the love of Christ, then the devil leaveth that man, he is defeated, and he fleeth, and angels come and minister unto that soul. Repentance and prayer are often urged upon you,—urged, till perhaps you are led by Satan to dislike to hear of them; but every sinner must come to them, if ever he means to come to a death-bed in peace, and to his judgment in hope.

To end all, let us remember that, whether we "be dead with Christ," or alive with this world, still hereafter live we must. Christ's Resurrection is the point appealed to as the proof of our immortality. If hereafter we do not live with Christ, still we must live. It is written of one man, that "it had been good for him if he had never been born^e." It had been good for us all never to have been born, if in the life beyond the grave we are to be "cast-aways." My brethren, never forget that it is a matter proved to us that we are immortal. If the love of God does not draw us unto Him, at least have love for yourselves; think on never-ending life, and never-ending torments! If we cannot be drawn with love, let us be dismayed from sin by horror: "Let the fear of the Lord be the beginning of wisdom^f."

^e Matt. xxvi. 24.

^f Prov. ix. 10.

Let religion be our concern, let it be our study, let it be our pursuit; let reason rule us, not passion; and then peace will begin in that bosom; it will "arise again," the Comforter will revive it. My brethren, God is in the world, let us walk with Him, let us live with Him. As Christ arose from the darkness of the grave, so, in the strength of prayer, do you arise from the darkness of your sins. Arise, and join yourselves unto "the joy of the whole earth^s;" bear with you your sacrifice, "a broken spirit, a broken and contrite heart^h;" spread before God the fragrant incense of humble and penitential prayer; then doth the Church of the Lord Jesus, in His authority and in His Name, promise you acceptance; then doth she pronounce, in His words, your pardon; then doth she, speaking in the Name of Christ and acting as the channel of His mercy, lay open unto you eternal life.

^s Lam. ii. 15.

^h Ps. li. 17.

SERMON XXIV.

First Sunday after Easter.

NUMBERS xxii. 6.

Come now, therefore, I pray thee, curse me this people.

THE first of those chapters which the Church takes from the Book of Numbers for her Sunday Lessons has been read to you this morning. It contains the history of the rebellion of Korah, Dathan, and Abiram, with their followers, against the spiritual government and teaching of Moses and Aaron, who were the appointed ministers of the Lord to rule the Israelites. This chapter is one of the many in the Bible which goes to prove that rule and government are things established and directed by the Lord, and, consequently, that violent opposition to established rule is always wrong. Moreover, that all opposition to authority, however moderate, has a danger in it, and that obedience is the plain duty of all men, except in the very gravest call for opposition; and where that call has been well and deeply considered by the wisest, the best, and the calmest men, who have sifted it and tried it both by earnest and anxious enquiries among themselves, and by prayer to God for guidance and control. And from

this also it would follow that opposition should be carried on by the most peaceful means.

That chapter, moreover, which contains the history of Korah's rebellion, shews us also that opposition to a priesthood appointed by the Lord is, as we might readily conclude, a great sin in the sight of God. Therefore it is that the Church beseeches Almighty God, in the Litany and in other places, to defend her from heresies and schisms, praying the Lord that there be no "divisions amongst us," but that our Jerusalem may be at peace in herself. And these prayers are offered up to God not only that the Church may not be disturbed within her own communion, but also that her people may escape the sin of setting themselves up against those who are placed over them in the Lord. The first Lesson in this Morning's Service shews, then, that in spiritual as well as in worldly matters God has, from the beginning, appointed spiritual rulers, and, consequently, that no one should desert or withstand these lightly and on trivial grounds. The most anxious searchings of our own hearts, the most earnest communing with God, the most close and strict study, both of the Bible and the early history of God's Church, with continual prayer, are quite necessary to justify the smallest opposition to a Church handed down to us from the apostles themselves, and in which, by God's providence, we may find ourselves. I would, from this chapter, impress upon your minds that it is a very great and serious step indeed lightly to give up a

Church derived from the Lord Jesus Christ, and that it is by no manner of means, as it sometimes would appear to be thought, a trifle of small consideration whether we uphold or oppose an altar of which Jesus is the plain foundation-stone.

But I have mentioned the sixteenth chapter of the Book of Numbers on account of another reason also, which is, that it has, in some degree, one doctrine in common with the chapter which the Church reads this evening. That common doctrine is this,—God has maintained an intercourse and a revelation of His will more or less clearly among mankind. In the Jews we see this intercourse maintained in Aaron and the priesthood. Among the Gentiles we see it, in the chapter before us, in the person of the Prophet Balaam; and before his time we find this intercourse with man kept up in Melchisedec, Noah, Enoch, and others; and by such as these it is likely that Abraham was taught. This part of Bible history shews, therefore, to a faithful mind that it has always been the plan of God not to “leave Himself without witness,” but to take the opposite course, and to make Himself more or less to be known, and for their blessing and benefit to be remembered among all people. As the lesson for this evening’s Service brings Balaam before us for the first time, I will now, as far as I am able, place his history and character before you, and then, by the permission of the Lord, will

endeavour to draw from it some applications likely by God's blessing to be useful to us. Balaam appears to have been a man decidedly inspired in no common degree by the Spirit of God, and called to be His prophet. This appears from the very high character which he had for divine foresight and authority. The words of King Balak, the son of Zippor, place this strongly before us. "I wot," says the King, "that he whom thou blessest is blessed, and he whom thou cursest is cursed^b." Therefore we find that, as soon as the children of Israel approached the borders of the Moabites, the King, who was alarmed at the victories which the Israelites had obtained over every nation which stood in their way, instantly sent messengers to the Prophet Balaam to come and look upon Israel and to lay his curse upon them; and both he and his Midianite allies were firmly persuaded that the destruction of Israel would follow the curse of Balaam. These messengers are called the "elders of Moab and Midian," ancient and honourable men, we may believe, who had authority in the councils of the people, and who stood about the person of the King. These elders carried with them a royal present from Balak, "the rewards of divination^c," in their hands. Balaam, however, was warned of the Lord that he should not go, neither should he curse Israel^d. The Prophet instantly shewed that obedience to God which is so clearly to

^b Numb. xxii. 6.

^c Ibid. 7.

^d Ibid. 12.

be seen in all this early part of his history. He immediately refused to wait upon the King, and sent back the Moabitish elders into their own country with their solicitations refused. The dread of Israel, however, which King Balak felt, still continued, and therefore, upon the return of the elders, he sent to Balaam a larger company and more honourable people, "princes," with the most ample promises and rewards, to entreat the Prophet to come and pass his curse over Israel. Now all this shews us what a value and importance was attached to that curse; it shews us that Balak and his Moabites, and the Midianites also, felt sure that, if they could draw a malediction and a curse from the lips of Balaam, Israel would fail; that the invader would feel the curse, and would be defeated; that he would wither away and perish. But Balaam never would have gotten this high reputation unless his prophecies had been true in all times before, and they could not have been true unless God had enlightened him, so that we may feel sure that Balaam was an elected prophet of God.

Next Sunday continues this history of Balaam in the Lesson of the Morning Service, and I would urge you to attend that service, if it were only that once more you might be comforted by hearing this beautiful prophecy of the progress of Israel from strength to strength, even unto the spiritual Strength of the whole earth, the coming and the rule of the Lord God Jesus Christ; a prophecy which Balaam poured

forth, as he looked over the camp of Israel, in the most splendid, the most majestic, and the most heavenly words. This prophecy, uttered not much less than fifteen hundred years before Christ came; whether in its splendour, its power, its truth, or its fulfilment, will stamp the fact upon your minds that Balaam was under the control of the Spirit of the Lord.

The chapter read to us this evening next tells us that, after the second message from King Balak, the Lord permitted Balaam to go with the Moabites; and probably he was permitted partly in order that our faith in after-times might be confirmed by the force of that prophecy which his journey was to call forth from Balaam. The words are, "And God came unto Balaam at night, and said unto him, If the men come to call thee, rise up and go with them, but yet, the word which I shall say unto thee, that shalt thou do^e." Balaam accordingly went with the princes. Next we read that "God's anger was kindled because he went^f." Here we may conclude that God's anger was kindled against the Moabites and Midianites on account of the pertinacity and eagerness with which they called for Balaam to come and curse Israel, and against Balaam because, not satisfied with being told once for all that it was the will of God he should not go, he looked for a change of mind in the Lord, that he might have the rewards

^e Numb. xxii. 20.

^f Ib. 22.

of divination. Balaam's covetousness was the cause of his journey; that was his motive; and thus no doubt he provoked the anger of the Lord. Balaam and the princes, we next read, were withstood in their journey by the angel of the Lord. Balaam, probably, heading the procession, as being most in honour, was the first to encounter the messenger of God; his "eyes were holden," but the ass whereon he rode, *thrice* in her fear endeavoured to avoid the sacred vision. Next she miraculously spake, and answered Balaam her master, when he chastised her in his wrath; and then the angel of the Lord became visible unto him, "and he bowed down his head and fell flat on his face." And Balaam said, "I have sinned; for I knew not that thou stoodest in the way against me: now, therefore, if it displease thee, I will get me back again. And the angel of the Lord said unto Balaam, Go with the men, only the word which I shall speak unto thee, that shalt thou speak. So Balaam went with the princes of Balak's."

We know not the counsel of the Most High, but probably the Lord sent this second and highly miraculous message to Balaam on his journey in order to impress him most entirely, and to render him firm and true when he came to be tempted by the promises and the wealth of the King of Moab. I read the chapter in this way because Balaam, though an

elected prophet of the Lord, was still a very worldly man, as his history proves to us. We find that he went to Balak, and there, controlled by the Spirit of God, three times, in the beautiful language of divine inspiration, poured forth his blessing upon the tents of Israel. The King of Moab dismissed him in wrath, and Balaam rose up and returned to his place. However, it seems that he did not rest there, but, falling away more and more from God, and being anxious for the favour of the King of Moab, he gave counsel to him that he should try to seduce Israel from the Lord God by entangling them with the sins of the Moabites and the worship of Baal-Peor^h. In this counsel he succeeded. Israel, always wilful, led astray by the women of Moab and Midian, turned aside to their idols. This transgression brought upon Israel that plague, which was stayed by Phinehas, the son of Eleazar, but not until four-and-twenty thousand of the people had been cut off. Balaam, after seeing the results of his evil counsel, still joined himself to the Moabites, till at last, when the Lord commanded Moses to lead up Israel against Midian, Balaam went out with the heathens to fight against the people of the Lord, and the Lord gave the battle unto Israel, so that they slew the kings of Midian, namely, "Evi, and Rekem, and Zur, and Hur, and Reba, five kings of Midian: Balaam also, the son of Beor, they slew with the swordⁱ."

^h Numb. xxxi. 16; Rev. ii. 14.ⁱ Numb. xxxi. 8.

Thus fell Balaam, and this is his history shortly stated. Every history in God's Word is filled with instruction for our guidance. Let me, my brethren, under God, end the service of this day with the endeavour to lay before you some of the spiritual lessons which this chapter contains. And first, I suppose, we are perfectly warranted when we say that Balaam appears in our eyes to be one of those who, having been "called," nevertheless was not "chosen." That he was called to the knowledge of the Lord, though he dwelt in the midst of a heathen people; that he was entrusted with the secret purposes of the Lord; that his soul was, in a great degree, under the guidance of the Lord,—these are all things which are proved to us in this evening's Lesson. It is also very plain, indeed, that his call to be the servant of the Lord was much more strong, much more evident and clear to every one about him, than any call which any one of us have ever received from the Spirit of the Most High. But when we remember how he was cut off; how he fell in the strife and wrath of battle, fighting against the people whom he knew to be of God; how that death was his punishment, because he had counselled Moab to lay temptations and snares in the way of Israel, and so, by leading Israel from his obedience, to take away the strength from the people of God; when we remember that for this sinful and traitorous counsel he was slain of the Lord in battle; and that, however warm his prayer for a good man's death might have

been, when the Spirit placed it in his heart, and breathed it forth from his inspired lips, nevertheless that he did not “die the death of the righteous, nor was his last end like his^k ;” when these plain and self-evident facts in his history come into our minds, then we must say that it seemeth to us that he was not “chosen.”

My brethren, how came this to pass, that a man called of the Lord, and in so very especial a manner, nevertheless failed of the death of a righteous man? It came to pass because he resisted the Grace of God!

My brethren, there be those who will say that when once you have received the grace of God, you cannot afterwards fall away utterly; but that though you may fall away, though you may sin after grace accepted, still that those sins will not prove your damnation, but that you will certainly recover, and by virtue of the grace given, that you will again be joined to the Lord, and that your slips, failings, and sins will not be reckoned against you. My brethren, we may wish that this doctrine was quite as true as it is lenient; because then it would seem to us that Satan would lose many a victim, and that almost every man would be saved. My brethren, many amongst us, many within this Christian land, have, I trust, been called. I do not mean called in the widest and coldest meaning of that word; I do

^k Numb. xxiii. 10.

not mean called as having ministers sent to preach unto you ; called, as being in a land where the Gospel of Christ is set up ; called, as being in a land where Christ has builded up His Church and bestowed His Sacraments. I do not mean called, as having God's Word laid open before your eyes and placed in your hands. I do not mean these obvious, plain, and daily calls, which the mercy of the Lord places before us every one, and thrusts as it were into our ears and into our bosoms all through our lives. I do not mean these calls, which are so mercifully plentiful that they are called 'common calls.' But I mean those very calls which are meant by those who tell you that after a call to grace there is no fatal fall for man. I mean those inward spiritual feelings, those warmings of the heart towards God and His Christ ; that faithful, bold, and fervent trust in His death, that deep self-rebuking, that close searching of the heart ; that rending repentance, those tears of self-abasement, those tears of love for Christ, those prayers for His pardon, then that hope, that quieting trust, that warm faith in His mercy ; I mean that spiritual call, beginning in a full sense of sin, ending in a firm trust in God ; and then I say,—and I thank God for His mercy to us when I say it,—I say that these spiritual calls are very common things ; and I doubt not but we have, many of us, felt them, have received grace in them, have been comforted, and then, like Balaam, have fallen into sin again, and feel, and know, and charge our souls

with it; that we have thwarted the Spirit, have accepted Christ into our hearts, and there have wounded Him afresh! These are the calls which I mean, and then I say that many, many a soul can answer, 'Yes! I have felt them, I have been with the Lord; and, like Balaam, I have travelled a little way with Him, till my fall came!' But you will be told that such a fall will never be your eternal destruction; that after grace so tasted, even wilful sin, though it is a reason for humiliation and prayer, has lost its danger. What, my brethren, is the sin which has lost its danger? Is there such a thing in all the created worlds as sin without danger? Wilful sin, and no danger in it! Who is the judge of that? Ourselves,—poor weak readers, and interested in the matter? Or is God the Judge, the hater, the avenger of all sin, the Lord God Almighty on His judgment-seat? Sin, without final danger! Where is there one word like that in all the pages of the Book of God? Sin is full of danger. It is the only thing which is dangerous, in the full sense of the word; because sin alone endangers the entire man, the soul as well as the body. But after grace fully accepted, it is more dangerous than ever; because then it is sin against clear knowledge, sin against our prayers, sin against a trust of pardon which has been granted us, against the comfort and strength which has been conferred. It is the sending forth the Spirit out of the heart, which He had lately enlightened and inhabited. It is turn-

ing Christ out of the temple. Is this sin without danger? It is of all sins the worst; it is the sin of the servant "who knew his master's will and did it not," and who was "beaten with many stripes¹!"

But you will be told, great sins no one in the grace of God ever will commit. My brethren, "be not high-minded, but fear^m;" he will commit as great a sin as Balaam committed. I will end this sermon by describing his sin, and offering it as a warning.

Balaam's sin seems to have been this; he learnt, by his communing with the Lord, that the Israelites were a people under the immediate protection of God. But Balaam himself was not an Israelite, he was probably of a nation allied to the Moabites; Balaam therefore felt anxious that Moab should not be destroyed by Israel. Therefore, in order to take Israel from the protection of God, Balaam counselled the Moabites to seduce Israel, by means of the Moabitish women, to worship the false gods of Moab and Midian, that thus, by having cast off the Lord, they might lose the Almighty power of God, which power Balaam foresaw would be a shield unto Israel as long as he continued steadfast with the Lord. This was his sin, and it was successful to some extent, though it brought down destruction in the end upon Moab, Midian, and Balaam himself. The sin of Balaam began in the love of his own friends and allies, and that led him

¹ Luke xii. 47.

^m Rom. xi. 20.

to employ worldly wisdom to thwart what he foresaw were the purposes of God against them.

No sin, my brethren, is a little sin; every wilful sin, at any rate, after we have received the knowledge of the truth, is the setting up of Satan, and, as far as the sin goes, is the putting down of the Lord Jesus Christ. This is what every wilful sin is. We may measure our sins with greater sins, and then fondly call them small, but every sin is the putting down the love and fear of God; and therefore Balaam's sin was this, and it was intended to be this. But if we do not carefully remember what all wilful sin is, Balaam's sin does not strike us as a great and horrible sin, because in the love of his allies and friends, in which his sin may have begun, there is something amiable, kind, and natural. However, there was something in Balaam's heart which he preferred before God. He could not say, "Perish Moab; perish Midian; perish, and be blotted out, the idolatries thereof, so that the Lord God may reign!" This he could not say.

Now what is every wilful sin but to travel in the same path? Whether we believe that we are in the grace of God, or whether we think that we are in a natural state,—what is every deliberate sin but the same course? There is something preferred to God! God's law is known, God's Gospels are known, and they are put aside, that the sin may be exalted in the stead thereof. Every such sin comes back to that point; something forbidden is preferred, is chosen, is

set up. higher than God's law. That is the reason why no such sin is a little sin. It saith unto Satan, "Yea, Lord;" and it saith unto Christ, "No!" Does it make the case better, that a falling sinner shall say, 'I have been called; therefore, though I do sin, I shall recover again.' Does this belief in a call make the case better? No! but every way worse. Because it is preferring Satan, when his hatefulness is better known, when Christ's holiness is better known! And as to his recovery, as to his ever having another call, how does the sinner who wilfully falls from grace know that? He knows not! "I know not, God knoweth!"

My brethren, he may be called to his judgment long before he turns again to repentance, long before he bethinks himself, and long before he prays. He may be taken in the midst of his iniquity. Balaam was called to be the servant and prophet of the Lord; he sinned, and in his sin he was taken before God. Thus a man may go before the Lord, and stand in the sight of the Lord Jesus Christ, with the stains of his sin fresh upon him; and will the call to godliness, which once he obeyed, but which he has now cast behind him, will that call then clothe his naked spirit, and be "the wedding-garment" which will hide his disgrace? Rich, my brethren, as God's blessed Word is to every sorrowful, every heart-broken sinner; rich as it is in promises, rich in peace, I do not read that it contains one promise to such a case as this.

The sum, therefore, of this evening's Lesson seems to be, that in every state of soul great watchfulness is needed, strict self-judgment, quick repentance, and constant calls for strength.

Balaam knew God; by His great mercy to us we also know Him; Balaam loved the world, and he fell; we also love the world. The danger is the same: and unless we look earnestly to the Example of the Lord Jesus Christ, and strive painfully to follow His steps through much self-correction, much self-denial, our fall may be the same.

In reading this chapter the Church brings to your minds this doctrine, "Humble your hearts, and be willing children!" My brethren, may God guide you to receive her teaching always into humble hearts, and so to suffer her to lead you, in a firm and holy hope, away from this world, and unto the peace and favour of our Founder and our Redeemer, the Lord Jesus Christ.

SERMON XXV.

Second Sunday after Easter.

ST. JOHN x. 16.

There shall be one fold, and one Shepherd.

WHEN our Lord Christ, in that portion of St. John's Gospel which has been read in this day's Service, speaks of the true shepherd and of the hireling, we must see that He is foretelling to His followers how that, in after times, two characters should appear in the Christian world. He informs them that there would be hirelings, and that there would be true shepherds; that the hireling would draw after him a portion of the flock, and that the true shepherd would have a portion also, which would follow him. The Lord states also that this division is displeasing to Him, because He adds that it shall not continue. He foretells that the hireling shall cease and fail, and that there "shall be one fold and one Shepherd."

There is one truth very plainly foretold both in the Gospels and in the Epistles, which is, that divisions would come in upon the Church of Christ. St. Peter, in his General Epistles, is particularly plain on this point; and in the second chapter of his

second Epistle describes the false teachers who would hereafter disturb the Church as clearly as though they were then standing before him; he earnestly warns Christians to avoid them, and to preserve themselves in unity. The Lord Christ strongly forewarns His disciples of this downfall. He says that peace would not follow His appearance upon earth, and that it would not spring out of His teaching, but divisions rather. He foretells that these divisions would run to a great height and power; that His preaching would even "send a sword upon the earth^a," and that "kingdom would rise up against kingdom, and nation against nation^b." All these things, which the Son of God hath foretold, have come to pass already; and as the minds of men are still often heated, blind, and angry on religious questions, it ought to be our prayer to God that there may be peace in the Church, and that such hard and cruel times may never befall us again. Every one who has made history his study, and especially if he has read the histories of the Church of Christ, will know that there have been repeated wars, and, moreover, very long, very bloody, very cruel wars, merely about religion. The sword has come, and "nation has risen up against nation."

Whenever we see the plain fulfilment of any of the prophecies of the Lord Jesus Christ, then we have the comfort of a fresh confirmation of our faith in

^a Matt. x. 34.

^b Matt. xxiv. 7.

our Redeemer, because we have another proof that He was one with God, and that He was sent forth from the Father. Being in the counsels of the Most High, He foreknew what was to happen upon earth, and therefore, in the great things which He foretold, and also in what we may consider the lesser things of which He spake, a man who knows his Bible, and knows also the history of the times now gone by and ended, will find himself as he reads meeting with fulfilment after fulfilment both of that which is little and that which is great of all that the Lord hath spoken. "Heaven and earth shall pass away," he will close the book and say,—“Heaven and earth shall pass away, but not one jot or tittle of the Word of the Lord^c.”

Now, my brethren, men would never have thought that all these divisions and separations, these blood-sheds and massacres, would have sprung out of the Gospel. The Gospel is a religion of peace and goodwill; it is a religion of mutual forbearance; it says, “Be not high-minded^d,” love one another, be not “contentious^e;” it says, “Be gentle, be peaceable, be forgiving;” it says further, “You must be forgiving, you must have forgiven all things, or else you will never be forgiven yourselves.” This is one main part of what the Gospel commands, so that a man when he heard the meek and lowly Jesus preach never would have said that destruction, war, and

^c Matt. xxiv. 35.

^d Rom. xi. 20.

^e 1 Cor. xi. 16.

death would come upon the world out of that teaching. But the Lord God foreknew it, because He also knew the power and the malice of Satan. The Lord God foreknew that Satan would labour hard to hinder the redemption of that world which he had led into sin. Christ Jesus foresaw that the Enemy would not willingly let so many souls escape his snares; he would not permit, if he could hinder it, such a heavenly plan of peace and grace to run over the world, and to bring forth therein happiness, charity, loving-kindness among men, and the increase withal of the kingdom and the glory of the Lord, and the fulfilment of the Redemption through the Lord Jesus Christ. Jesus well foresaw all this. He knew that, as in heaven so on earth, the spirits that are lost and fallen would fight against Him and oppose; He knew that their evil power would produce contention and disturbance for a long season, and that His Church would travail and labour and be "sore vexed."

We must look for those things to come upon us which the Lord hath spoken. Accordingly we find that these evil times have happened, and in some sense we may say, are still happening, upon the earth. At first Satan and his evil angels stirred up the heathen world to strangle Christianity in her birth. There are many histories of the terrible persecutions which, in the early days of the Church of Christ, both tried her and purified her. The history, however, where all must be true, is the history to turn

to in the first place ; and so in the New Testament you may read, in the short account which St. Paul gives of his own persecutions, how the Christians generally were persecuted ; how their persecutions grew at last to be fiery trials ; how they were beheaded, crucified, sawn asunder, burnt, cast to be torn to pieces of wild beasts ; how cruelty, in short, exhausted her inventions in an unfeeling age to tear the faith and the love of Christ from the hearts of all mankind.

The Lord, however, upheld them that were His own. Through persecution and against persecution the words of Christ still rose upon the world and flourished. From a few men the Christians became a multitude, and from a multitude they grew into kingdoms and nations. Satan saw his efforts fail. He could not destroy nor put down the Word of the Lord. It was too mighty for him. It was too mighty because it was so pure, because it was so merciful, because it was so just ; it was too mighty because it was so true. Men would have it ; and where they were willing, Christ's grace aided them, and the love of God cherished them, and the fellowship of the Holy Ghost upheld them, so that they stood in the Lord. Satan saw the faith in Christ rise and establish itself under these graces, and he was defeated.

But he is never idle, and therefore he said, " Let me divide, and so I shall destroy." And now came into fulfilment the words of the Lord. Then came

the hireling, and then, as St. Peter had prophesied¹, Satan sent false teachers, divisions came, and separations, and oftentimes the sword. This has been the condition of Christendom, more or less, ever since Christianity has been spread abroad among men, and it is the condition of Christendom now. We have, however, the comfort of knowing that this condition will not last for ever. Christ has said there shall be at last one fold and one Shepherd, and this promise, from God's lips, will come to pass as well as the others also.

We must believe that the Church, when she ordered us to read this Gospel in the Communion Service to-day, intended that we should turn our minds towards the doctrine which it contains. I will, therefore, in what follows, endeavour, under the guidance of Christ the Lord, to shew what are some of the evils which follow divisions among you, and also how we ought to carry ourselves towards them who "separate themselves²." And first, I take it as a certain and undoubted fact, that we of the Church are of the fold of Christ. I take it for a fact, because, in every one of its characters and marks, we are that self-same Church which Christ the Lord established when He and His holy apostles were upon the earth. The apostles were the first bishops in the Church of Christ; they consecrated other bishops to succeed them; these bishops consecrated their suc-

¹ 2 Pet. ii. 1.

² Jude 19.

cessors; the successors consecrated others to come after them; they who came after still followed the same course, even till our fathers' times arrived; and thus the succession of the bishops in our fathers' days, and of those in our own, has been regularly handed down to us in one unbroken chain and line, even from those very apostles who walked with the Lord Jesus Himself. These bishops ordained your ministers, so that in your bishops, priests, and deacons you have the very same unbroken line which in the beginning of the Church of Christ was appointed and ordained by the apostles of the Lord.

Now, do I say these things to boast? Far otherwise: I say it with trembling rather. Your priests cannot but feel that they are especially set aside to call together God's flock, and to rescue weak and sinning souls from the snares of Satan; and when they look on their great work, and on their own weakness, your ministers have no boast in their bosoms, far rather a prayer; and they bespeak your prayers also, my Christian brethren. They fully feel that they stand in need of constant prayer, that they may be always innocent, and always working, "as workers together with God^b," leading you towards God, and seeking, in the salvation of your souls, the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ. These are the matters which your priesthood have before them; and that they may, under God, attain unto them, they make them

^b 2 Cor. vi. 1.

the subject of their own daily prayers, and they beg such prayers also from all Christian people. But while your priests look on their own calling, and also on their work, with fear, still, for your sakes, they look on Christ's ordained Church with great gratitude; and for this reason, Christ has graciously promised that He will be with His Church "alway, even unto the end of the world¹." This was the last promise which the Lord made, the last words from the mouth of the Lord God before He ascended up into heaven were these; just before He departed away from His apostles, just before He left them until He shall return in judgment, then it was that He gave them this most remarkable and most comforting promise, "Lo, I am with you alway, even until the end of the world:" a promise most comforting, because it assures us that our most holy faith shall stand; it assumes that God is with us always, that we are His flock; most comforting, because we learn from it, and also from the text as well, that we shall never be confounded, while we are the true and faithful followers of our Lord Christ.

But it is not only a comforting promise thus generally; it is a comfort also to every single member of the Church; it is a comfort, because he knows that he has been brought by Christ's baptism into His fold; that appointed sacrament has been administered to him by Christ's appointed minister; what

¹ Matt. xxviii. 20.

can be done by man in faith and in obedience has been done. Therefore he feels assured that he is enrolled and admitted among the flock. What follows? Why, that as long as he walks after the Spirit, his prayers will be heard by the Lord Jesus; his faith in Christ will be accounted to him for righteousness; his obedience will, for Christ's sake, be acceptable. Is not this a privilege for which to be thankful? My brethren, all of you have souls to be saved, all of you have sinful souls. Is it not a comfort, an unspeakable comfort, to find that there is one path "made straight," in which sin may be overcome; one sure plan of redemption from the first established, and through all the changes of this shifting world, even unto this very day, supported and maintained, in which a contrite and believing soul may walk quietly and in peace? But if there is this holy Jerusalem still mercifully upheld upon the earth, then to go out from her must be dangerous. It is dangerous, and very dangerous, to the soul.

One danger is that spiritual pride will arise in our breasts when we separate and divide. We may not suspect it, but nothing, nevertheless, seems to follow more closely on divisions than spiritual pride. We are better, we say, than those whom we have left behind. When we divide and go asunder from a Church which is plainly handed down to us from Christ Himself, our feeling ought to be one of deep sorrow and the most trembling hesitation. We ought to question ourselves closely; we ought to ask, 'Am

I indeed safe and right in separating myself? Satan, I well know, loves divisions and oppositions; Christ loves, and Christ commands, unity and peace; am I right when I go out and oppose? I am a poor and weak mortal; my learning and my knowledge are at least but small; it is no hard matter to deceive me and to lead me wrong; Satan will attempt to deceive me, in order that he may injure my own soul and other souls through me; I am warned that he may come to me "transformed into an angel of light^k." Is he not doing this now? Am I then right, and am I safe, when I divide the household of the Lord? These ought to be the thoughts when we leave an apostolically founded Church; but Satan will not suffer his misguided victim to have such thoughts. Rather he comes and enters into some zealous but blinded breast, and then he tempts him to say, 'I do not see the meaning of this, I do not like that; here Christ's Church,'—for no one says that it is not Christ's Church,—'here Christ's Church observes a ceremony which I think could be made better; here she has not one which I would introduce; now I hear her minister insist upon a doctrine which I disregard, namely, the necessity of good living; now I hear him tell me what I do not like to hear, that I cannot be saved in Christ if my Christianity is only putting my trust in Christ without a holy life; these things I do not like, I

^k 2 Cor. xi. 14.

shall go out and make a more pure Church for myself.' Such are too often the thoughts, and indeed the words, of those who desert our altar, and they never think of asking themselves, "Nay, but, O man, who art thou, that thou replest against God¹?" It is thought not at all a sin thus to divide and scatter God's people. There are but few humble hearts in these days who have the thoughtful grace to say, 'I cannot see why this is done; I cannot see why that is preached; how is it likely that I should? am not I, on the whole, one of the unlearned? am I not but imperfectly taught? is it likely that I should see and understand all that is laid before me? ought I not to go and ask of my minister before I desert him? God has appointed him to teach this parish, if He had not appointed him he would not be here; before I desert him ought I not at least to ask him "by what authority he doeth these things?" Haply he may answer me, haply he may shew me, that by the authority of the Lord Christ, Who sent him, he doeth these things^m. This ought to be the hesitation and the caution with which a man leaves a Church built upon the apostles, "Jesus Christ Himself being the head corner-stone." But no! spiritual pride forbids this; a pride which is often seen to put on the gestures of humility, a pride which seems unto man to be lowly-minded, forbids this. These are very much the days in which "every one doeth that

¹ Rom. ix. 20.

^m Matt. xxi. 23.

which seemeth good in his own eyes.” But all this is pride ; it begins in pride, and it ends in pride. But pride is not in the Lord Jesus. Our Redeemer was not proud ; He was humble and meek. Pride is not in God. The Almighty Maker of all in the heavens and all upon the earth, is not proud. Pride is Satan’s spirit. Pride led him to his fall. Now in earth he works by pride ; his oppositions, his destructions, his bloodshed, (for all these are Satan’s works,) his quarrels, his malice, his uncharitableness, all these spring from pride ; and nothing nurses these evils more ; nothing is more fruitful in wars and bloodshedding ; nothing more produces pride, malice, and uncharitableness ; nothing is a more abundant source of contentions than schism, proud division on questions in religion. This contentiousness is one evil which springs up when we go out from the fold.

But it is not the only danger. Another great evil, and an evil full of the most urgent danger, which arises to the Christian world from divisions, is that the Word of God is not faithfully preached. The ministers of those who depart from the Church are fearful of offending their congregations. If they were too plain with them ; if they told one, perhaps, that he was fond of fraudulent gain, he might desert the congregation of the reproving preacher ; if they told another that he was the deceived slave of spiritual pride, he also might seek a new teacher : thus, and in many such like cases, actual sin is permitted by the teacher to go on unreproved, and the Word

of God is shortened by the very person, who puts himself forward as the dispenser thereof. Satan is not idle in these matters; he brings forward sins, and the temptations to sins, but the preacher trembles to reprove, because he is self-appointed; he lacks authority from God; he may say what he will, but he cannot shew that he is sent out from Jesus Christ.

Gross sin, perhaps, he may venture to speak against, but the sly, covert falsehood, the boasting temper, the uncharitable censure of others, these and many other unchristian sins he must permit, or he may offend his people, and his flock may cease to follow him. So sin moves on allowed and undisturbed; "the hireling fleeth because he is an hirelingⁿ;" he cannot, in a bold, independent, upright tone, meet sin with that reproof which, in all her shapes, she will receive from the priest whose authority is handed down to him from the Lord.

But then, my brethren, if this is some of the fruit which divisions bring, has not Satan sown a tare in the field which produces him a harvest? If a teacher is withheld, for fear of offending his followers, from denouncing sins,—spiritual pride perhaps in one, confident presumption in another, craftiness and smooth deceit in a third,—whose work is he doing upon earth? Not the work of the Lord Jesus Christ. Drunkenness and fornication he may reprove; violence, theft,

ⁿ John x. 13.

he may condemn,—who may not?—because all the world reproves these. But these open and bold crimes are not the only sins to be reprov'd. Satan sows a far larger crop. These inward sins of the heart, these sins of pride, of boasting, of deceit, and such like, these damn a soul as much as other sins, and Satan cares not by what rock we suffer shipwreck, so that indeed by his evil desires souls are sunken. Whose work, then, does he toil in, who cannot reprove every sin, who cannot warn you against every danger? Why, he does not do the work of the Lord Jesus. But, my brethren, they who depart out from us, and who depend on the favour of their followers for their countenance and support, can hardly reprove such vices, neither in many cases do they.

These are two of the evils which befall us when separations from the Church, built up in Jesus Christ, come in amongst us. There are many more than these, but in the compass of a sermon we cannot consider them all. I will therefore end this discourse by going on to consider how we of the Church of the Lord ought to carry ourselves towards those who wander from us. In all things we must make Christ our pattern; as He bore Himself towards those who were not with Him, so must we bear ourselves. We must be firm in adhering to the truth; constant in supporting, according to our power, those who hold the truth with us; gentle in urging the truth upon our opponents; fair and upright towards

all the world. It is your duty to the Lord Christ never to let slip an opportunity of endeavouring to recall to His Church those who neglect her services, and those also who oppose her teaching. This may always be done in the kindest tone. It is a kind, a most kind thing, to draw back souls in error to the fold of the Lord Jesus Christ, and it is never done better than when it is done in kindness. You may say, 'Are not the priests of the Lord God duly and certainly handed down to us from Christ and His apostles? Did not the Lord Jesus promise to His ministry, when He ascended up into heaven, that He would "be with them alway, even unto the end of the world?"' Is it not certain, then, that He is with His Church and her ministers? Did He not give His sacraments into their hands? Is not this also an absolute certainty? What right, therefore, have they to handle His sacraments who have not been admitted into His priesthood? Is not this a most serious question? Shall any person feel sure that he has taken, for instance, the sacrament of the Body and Blood of Christ, if he takes it not from an ordained priest, but from some self-appointed man? Will you, at your death, so take it; and so, in your last approach to God while you are on earth, worship Him seemingly at least in opposition to His appointment, and worship Him therefore in doubt? Is this the way to die in "sure hope" and trust? But if

you will not die in this doubtful worship, will you live in it? Is that a safe path, can it be a safe and right path, which you may see renders your worship of God itself, and in its most solemn portions, a most questionable practice?

Then, on the other hand, 'Is not your ordained priesthood truly ordained? Were not the sacred things committed unto their hands by the Lord Jesus Himself? Do they not preach God's Word? Do they not walk after Him meekly and quietly upon earth? Do they not oppose themselves to all sin; are they not opposed by all sin? Do not these things mark a Church with God? Is it not safe, is it not pious, is it not obedient, to "enter in and dwell there?"' These are questions which every one may kindly ask, and indeed may kindly press upon those "who are not with us." It is, moreover, our duty, my brethren, to do this. It is our duty towards God, it is our duty towards our neighbour.

In these days there is far too much recklessness of spirit, far too much reliance upon proud opinion and shallow, hasty judgment. Thanks be to God, hereafter there will be but "one fold and one Shepherd;" therefore, as a means to this peaceful state, more light and clearer knowledge seem to be rising, from time to time, upon the world; and in the end there is no doubt but out of this clearer knowledge, good-will, peace, and agreement will come upon us, and the Church will be, as Jerusalem should be, "at

unity in itself^p.” Satan well knows this, and therefore he fears lest sins and downfalls should be lessened, and he would destroy such a course of things. “He hateth the light, because his deeds are evil^q,” and therefore he would confound it. Accordingly he tempts us to be proud, to rely upon ourselves, to think rashly rather than to believe humbly, to question God’s appointments rather than to seek His gifts. There is far too much of this in the world now, and if we would in all things serve our God, it is our duty, in all peace and gentleness of spirit, kindly, but firmly, to endeavour to modify and lessen this proud and unholy temper. If we love our neighbour we should labour to lessen it, we should try to abate trust in self-opinion and rash judgment, things generally wrong, but especially and fearfully wrong, when in the smallest matter—(and I have not spoken unto you of small matters)—when in the smallest matter men fearlessly set up their own views and plans against the ordinances and the appointments of the Lord God.

But for yourselves, my brethren, may the words of Christ still descend upon you, “Fear not, little flock^r.” Be stedfast, be in prayer always unto Christ for assistance in all your temptations, and for His forgiveness for all your sins. If you will follow and sincerely obey the gracious movements of Christ’s Holy Spirit within your hearts, your sins

^p Ps. cxxii. 3.

^q John iii. 19, 20.

^r Luke xii. 32.

will become fewer and fewer, and your hopes and consolations will be continually more rich and sure. Lean upon Christ in prayer, and you will “be strong in the Lord^a.” Graces will come in answer to supplication, and the sense and the fear of your weakness will constantly lead you to beseech God for continual guidance, will compel you unto great carefulness in your spiritual walking, and will bend your minds to humbleness. This course will shew “to them that separate themselves^b” what is the peace, what is the trust and happiness, which warms and animates the Church of the Lord Jesus. By the blessing of God upon your lives you shall bring unto the Lord “other sheep, which are not of this fold^c,” and they shall hear His words in the manner which He hath appointed. In this way you may bring back stray sheep which have wandered in the wilderness, and if your zeal for God and His Christ should be so blessed, you will feel happy in the thought that your labour and service have borne fruit acceptable to God. If we all “worked thus together with God^d,” we might in our own country hasten the time, and with greater speed bring in His promise, that there shall be one fold and one Shepherd. Then would there be much peace amongst us, much Christian love and kindness. In the glory promised unto her in prophecy our Church would already stand glorious in her unity and meekness: “Violence shall no

^a Eph. vi. 10. ^b Jude 19. ^c John x. 16. ^d 2 Cor. vi. 1.

more be heard in thy land, wasting nor destruction within thy borders; but thou shalt call thy walls Salvation, and thy gates Praise. The Lord shall be unto thee an everlasting light, and thy God thy glory; and the days of thy mourning shall be ended^y."

^y Isa. lx. 18—20.

SERMON XXVI.

Third Sunday after Easter.

DEUT. iv. 10.

Gather Me the people together, and I will make them hear My words, that they may learn to fear Me all the days they shall live upon the earth, and that they may teach their children.

THE word Deuteronomy is composed of two Greek words, and it means a repetition of the law. This Book is, what its name signifies, the giving forth of the law a second time. But the law of God is in this Book made more clear, because it contains many explanations which are not found in the other Books; and, while the law is thus explained, it is also enforced by many exhortations to obedience, which are urged upon the Jews with great tenderness and power.

Moses delivered this Book to the Jews a short time before he died; and there can be no doubt but he was moved to these strong and most earnest appeals to the hearts of the people over whom he had so long been set as their appointed guide, by the knowledge that they were now about to lose his care and over-sight, that they would be exposed to many dangerous temptations from surrounding and idolatrous nations, and that above all other dangers

was the danger of their own rebellious hearts, especially when he would be taken from them, and they would stand in sore need of so immediate and so favoured an intercessor to appeal to God for them, and to obtain their pardon when they were in sin.

The chapter which the Church has ordered to be read to-day may be said to contain within itself most of the leading marks of the Book of Deuteronomy. It strongly urges upon the Jews the duty of obedience to the laws of the Lord; it abounds in promises of the richest blessings, if the people would religiously adhere to the commandments of God; it implores them with great tenderness to live in obedience; while it is full of the most fearful denunciations of the wrath of God, if they should cast aside in a rebellious temper those ordinances, which were now for a second time delivered to them.

We may believe that Moses was well aware that he was shortly now to be taken away. In the twenty-first verse of this chapter he seems to look forward to his death as not distant. "The Lord," he says, "was angry with me for your sakes,—I must die in this land, I must not go over Jordan, but ye shall go over and possess that good land." We may believe that these words were occasioned by the knowledge that his time was now spent, and that, having brought the people through all their trials, from the bondage of Egypt, from the perils of the wilderness, from the punishments of their own sinful tempers, and from under the wrath of Almighty God, even

unto the borders of the promised land, which he himself was not to enter, Moses now felt that his work was ended, and that his task was done; that he was now about to lay down his anxious life of care, prayer, and intercession; and, having brought his mission to a triumphant close, that he was about to leave to the care of others that prize for which, under God, he had toiled so long; that he was to have granted him only a view of the promised land; and that it was a land which the Jews would keep and enjoy, as long as they kept their headstrong tempers in obedience to the laws of God.

This knowledge of his own approaching death will account for the earnest and anxious tone which Moses uses in the Book of Deuteronomy. It tells us why we read throughout that Book the sweetest and richest promises, why we meet with the most urgent and beseeching appeals to the good feeling of the people, the most fearful threatenings, and the most clear explanations. So that this Book has the further force of being, in a manner, the last words of a most wise, a most tender, and a most God-fearing man. It comes to us, therefore, with an additional sanctity of character. It is, as it were, the last and parting exhortation of a father to his assembled family. It is full of tender love, it is full of thankfulness that he has a rich bequest to hand down from God who gave it; it is full of awe and fear if they be disobedient; it is full of prayers and entreaties to them to keep by obedience what they

have inherited by favour; and lastly, like the last words of all good men, it is full of truth.

These are some of the thoughts which will arise in the mind of every reflecting person as he reads the Book of Deuteronomy; there can be no doubt but they are the thoughts which our Church, careful for the souls of her children, would wish to plant in our bosoms.

The words which I have taken from the Lesson of the day for my text are quite as valuable and quite as necessary to ourselves as they could be to the Jews,—“Gather Me the people together, and I will make them hear My words, that they may learn to fear Me all the days that they shall live upon the earth, and that they may teach their children.” If it is true that we are as likely to forget God as were the Jews; if we may as readily corrupt ourselves, set up our world-worship, and invent our excuses as the Pharisees and Scribes invented theirs; if this is true, the caution is spoken to us also, as well as to Israel, “Take heed to yourselves, lest ye corrupt yourselves, and the Lord scatter you among the nations^a.” In this way I understand this chapter, and indeed the whole Book of Deuteronomy itself; I will accordingly, in what follows, endeavour to shew that national as well as individual blessings follow national religion; and I will then point out one means by which, under God’s help, the religious feelings of

^a Deut. iv. 16, 27.

our nation may be strengthened and ripened into action.

Now, worldly people seldom care to ask how true it is that the blessings of Almighty God do descend upon a God-fearing people. The reason why they should be thus careless as to a fact of the very greatest importance to us is, I suppose, because worldly people heed very little the Word of God. There is nothing laid down in the Bible with more clearness than this, that the Lord will, and doth, always punish a vicious people by overthrowing them, and by blotting them out from among the nations. This is the great threat which Moses used to compel the Jews to the observance of the laws of God; and both in the case of Israel, and in the case of other and even heathen nations, the Bible is full of instances of national downfalls following national sin. Indeed, when Moses published these threats and warnings in the ears of the people, the doctrine itself, in those early times, was no new thing upon the earth.

The destruction of the guilty cities of the plain had taken place more than four hundred years before Moses was appointed the leader and teacher of the Jews; and it was a downfall well understood to have been expressly sent on account of the sinfulness of those cities. The overthrow of Pharaoh and the sufferings of Egypt, when the Book of Deuteronomy was written, were too fresh in the recollections of the Israelites to need any mention. If we read

the Bible, in its parts of later history, and look to the fates of nations, after this Book was delivered, we see the same doctrine held and fulfilled. The Jews are themselves great examples in this way, and are very fit to be regarded by all nations as examples; no doubt it is part of the counsel of the Most High that they should be so regarded. No sooner do they turn aside from the worship of the Lord, than in His mercy God sends to them some inspired prophet to call them back from their errors, and to make manifest to them the certain destruction which disobedience will entail on them in the end. If they persevere in their evil courses, the end arrives, and it is destruction; we see them pass into captivity, we see them scattered abroad, we see Jerusalem overthrown, and they are no more a people.

If we look to other states, however mighty they may be, we see the same universal law of God pursuing them in their vices, overtaking and overwhelming them. If I were to give you an account of the vastness of the kingdom of Babylon, I should be as likely to confuse you by the greatness of the subject, as to edify you by what I might lay before you; but this may be taken as certain, that there is now no city upon earth which approaches to the state and condition of ancient Babylon. Yet what did wealth profit them? Isaiah was sent forth from the Lord to foretell their downfall on account of their iniquities, and their doom followed till the city became, as he said it was ordained to be, a lurking-

place for the wild beasts, a den for reptiles and serpents, a habitation for the bittern and the crane.

In the same way we may remember Nineveh, which is stated to have been so large that it was three days' journey to pass through it ; this, in human eyes, is a vast amount of power ; but the city was full of sin, full therefore of weakness ; and its situation, for a long time lost and unknown, is now discovered buried beneath the sands of the desert.

These are two of the mighty people whose sinfulness brought down a righteous destruction from the Lord God.

In later times there have been later examples. Let me mention what we have all heard of, the Roman empire. It was as large as the whole civilized world, and it would seem that no enemy on earth could rise up against it. In its pride and wealth, however, it became sinful in the extreme. The Lord God then called forth the simpler and more pure tribes who skirted round its borders ; these broke in upon its boundaries here and there ; in the words of Scripture, " the Lord began to cut them short^b ;" the Romans dwindled and withered before hardier and more virtuous races, till they ceased from among the nations, and we ourselves and other people stand upon their ruins.

Now if you ask me, my brethren, why I have thus brought before your recollection some of the

^b 2 Kings x. 32 ; margin, ' to cut off the ends.'

leading instances, in which we may see from the earliest times national guiltiness producing national destruction, national downfalls following national sinfulness, I answer that I have taken this course to-day, because it enforces one leading doctrine in the Lesson which the Church orders to be read in her Services for this day, and also because I pray that we may, as a people, be very jealous and fearful of the advance and growth of any sinful courses among ourselves, for we may be sure that in this life, as well as in the life to come, destruction waiteth upon wickedness.

Moreover, my brethren, I think that such thoughts are not ill-timed. We have, as a people, been favoured by the Lord for many years with much success, wealth, and dominion. It is a question also whether we have not thereupon been growing confident, careless of God, trusting in ourselves, luxurious and covetous. If this is true, then it is true also that sin in many ways is entering in upon us. There would be no room for these questions and surmises if we were really strong in obedience to God's Word, as a Christian people ought to be.

But how shall such things be amended, if in reality they exist? or what power shall any one parish, especially a small and quiet parish like this, what power has it to stay in any way the advance of national sin, if it is really in any strength rising and encroaching on us? It is to this point, as to the second and last part of my text, that I wish to come.

Let no man, then, fold his hands in despair when he would do the work of God. All men are in themselves weak and powerless, but in God no man is weak. In His cause every man can do much, if his time and his heart are really set to the labour. Whenever man works in faith and prayer, God works with him ; and so it is that oftentimes from one weak man the "mightiest works do shew themselves forth." This thought alone is enough to stop any tongue which would say, "Lord, what can I do?" It gives back the answer, "Work together with God." Then, my brethren, it is not for man to say what the amount of your success may be in the end.

But I am not about to shew you how much each single person may do in the power of the Lord ; I intend rather to stand on the plain words of the text, and to turn your minds to one small but delightful Christian practice, which if it was observed by you all, each in your own houses, would make each dwelling-place a blessed abode, a small, indeed, but a pure well of that living water, which would always, as you or your children passed out into the world, be sending forth sound Christian feeling, holiness of life, and grace, into the different scenes and occupations of this land.

The Lesson for the day gives us these words, which I have chosen as full of sacred teaching,—
"Gather Me the people together, and I will make them hear My words, that they may learn to fear Me all the days that they shall live upon the earth, and that they may teach their children."

The last words in this verse are a most blessed command both to yourselves and to your little ones.

We ourselves have been more or less bred up under the Word of the Lord ; more or less we have been held in the knowledge and in the fear of God “all the days that we have lived upon the earth ;” the duty which is built upon that, is that we should “teach our children.”

In this, and no doubt in every other congregation of Church people, there will be many mothers who *do* make it their care to bring up their little ones in the knowledge of God. But then, on the other hand, many there are who slight this great duty, or neglect it altogether. It is not my purpose to compute or reckon up how many begin the religious education of their families in the first years of infancy, and how many are careless in this great matter ; but it is my fear that with very many there is too much carelessness to be seen, carelessness both as to giving actual teaching, and carelessness also as to setting a proper example ; and, accordingly, I draw your attention to the subject.

Sin, then, let us remember, in some of its many shapes, begins in childhood ; there are, even in our first days, little angry tempers, passions ; there is covetousness, wilfulness, which shew very plainly what fruit is likely to spring up if there is no proper cultivation of the heart. Let that cultivation begin, then, in the earliest days. Let a child be taught, as soon as he can be brought to know, that there is

one good and all-seeing God in heaven, who made everything, and who supports and protects every one upon earth; let him be taught that this Almighty God looks with wrath and anger upon those that are wicked, but that He blesses with continual care and loving-kindness those that are good. When these simple lessons are well understood, next, in some few and short sentences, let a child be taught to pray to God; let him learn to beseech God to bless his father and mother, his brethren, and any relation or near friend, with whom the family may be closely connected. Then let his prayers, when these are perfect, be enlarged, so that he may ask the Lord to make and keep him a good child. In the same short and simple way let him thank God for whatever mercies he has received; let him thank God, that he has good parents, that he has had his food, his clothing, and his health; and then let him confess to God any fault which he may have fallen into, and let him pray to be forgiven. When all these things are common to him, then he will be old enough to learn and to understand the Lord's Prayer.

Now perhaps you think that in this detail of what ought to be our nursery practices I am laying before you what may be called trifles. But that is far from the case; I am opening to you the gate of that course which every man on earth ought to keep, which is holy in every step, and which ends, by the mercy of Jesus Christ, in peace in heaven. It is

a course so holy that it ought to be handed over to no one; the mother alone ought to guide her child's feet into it, and where she neglects to do so, she stands before the Lord in sin. These little prayers, these simple pieties, are neither trifles in the sight of God nor in their power over your little ones; and I mention them the more minutely, because their worth and their power is great, because they are often overlooked and omitted, and because some of you may not know how to begin in this matter.

Many of us, surely, my brethren, in this simple manner were in our tender years brought near to the Lord. Many of us, no doubt, have to remember and to thank God for it, that first we bent our knees in prayer upon our mother's lap, and that in that posture of love and supplication we first raised our souls, then pure, and our tender voices, then unworldly and true, up unto the throne of the Lord God. If any mother has hitherto neglected this beautiful practice in her family, I would beseech her to begin it at once; the effect which it produces on all is full of grace, to the child it is beyond all price. Schools may do much for your little ones; but it is difficult in schools to avoid making what is taught look like a task and a hardship: this should never be the case with prayer to God; prayer is a privilege, a hope, an advantage, and it ought so to be understood and felt. If religion was thus grafted on the earliest thoughts of infancy, and nourished among the tender cares and fondnesses of the mother,

I would be bold to hope that it would never die throughout life. I would hope that in that heart there would always be grace, overborne by temptation, it might be, in after life, clouded by sins, stained with defilements of this world, wounded in its conflicts, but never dead. There will always be in the heart of one thus taught in childhood, even in his latest days, days perhaps of worldly, perhaps even of sinful life, a remaining, and if a weak, still a lingering, principle of religion; holiness and the mother will always return into the remembrance together. There will be that which may lead the sinner to repentance and to prayer still hanging about his heart, still alive within his bosom. In the darkest moments, when sin may be most powerful, or when life may seem to be ending in wrath, there will be that to which the minister may appeal, the tender part still left within the heart which he may touch, and call forth tears, and years after she is in her rest he may awaken that which the mother first taught—simple prayer to God, pure and humble supplication. Her teaching may stand forth, made lovely by her image, and her image may arise hallowed by her teaching; they may bend the soul into a deep and gracious repentance, and thus the mother may be the instrument of obtaining for the child, which she brought into the world, eternal life, when it turns from its sins, through the atonement of Jesus Christ our Saviour.

Now let me add that every child, that every mother

bears will be a sinner, and, if he lives his days, will have to tread this passage of constant prayer, or he will be lost. Then we may see one reason why Christ, who died for His creation, said,—“Suffer the little children to come unto Me^b ;” she will see that it is His merciful foresight which has commanded her to let religion be the first thing taught, to teach it herself, to make it by early habit part of the nature of her child, so that it can never be taken away from him again. Seeing this, she will perceive that the short sentence lisped in prayer, the small petition of the infant, is not a trifle, nor a detail to be slighted. It is the first setting up of the kingdom of the Lord in the bosom of the child ; it is the dawning of the glorious course of the Day-spring from on high ; it is the grain of mustard seed, the smallest thing, but it is to spring up, to overshadow, to shelter the whole man.

These may be considered to stand among the effects of religious teaching on the mind of the man himself. What are its effects on the world ? They are very gracious, and to the glory of God. Let every infant know among its first perceptions that there is one great God ruling over all ; let this knowledge be introduced with the tender care, and accompanied through after-life by the sweet recollections, of a mother’s teaching ; and, in that case, every infant will go on into active life with a heart rendered more tender by the charities of the Gospel,

^b Mark x. 14.

more firm by his faith therein. These are the characters which are wanted in this age, and, indeed, in every age. Men may always be found hard and griping towards their fellow-creatures, cold and distant towards God; why is this, but because they are not Christian in spirit, and most probably in youth and in childhood have been neglected in godly training? Let them be warm-hearted in their religion; let them lean upon Christ their Redeemer; let them strive to follow His steps; let them be kind, gentle, turned towards forbearance in their dealings one with another: this would be seen, if they were trained in Gospel principles on their mother's knee. It would be a very gracious thing towards the world, and would advance the glory of God as far as any thing which man can do can advance it. But this cannot be until Gospel principles increase, nor can that be while infants and children have homes and parents have hearts wherein the Lord is not.

There can be no doubt but our Church has been led to order the chapter, which I have considered in part, to be read to-day, in order that we may extend to ourselves and carry into practice the religious teaching which it enjoins; in order also that we may comfort ourselves with the promises and blessings, which follow obedience to this command. There may be many ways, in which religion may be taught, even when parents teach it not; but these methods will never touch the heart in the same powerful and tender manner as parental teaching. I have there-

fore insisted only on that way, which ought to be the first step which every child makes towards godliness,—a step, moreover, which makes every other step in the progress at once sweet, natural, and full of delightful recollections. This practice, if established as a rule, and accepted as a paramount duty, (as in all Christian spirits it must be,) would multiply religious hearts, and must, by God's blessing, increase the happiness of this life, and, under Christ, augment salvation.

Lastly, to neglect the Christian education of your little ones is a most fearful sin. As the mother can educate her children in this course better than any other, so it is more her duty to do so; and therefore if she neglects this duty, her sinfulness in this matter is greater than that of any other. We do not so consider our children or our possessions, very possibly; but nothing in this world is our own; we hold all under trust; we are required to turn all to the glory of God, to the welfare of mankind. How shall this be done, if children, by our neglect, are to go forth sinners? Eli's children "made themselves vile," and "he restrained them not," therefore his house was cut off. Why is this written? There would be no need for us to know what became of Eli's house, but that we might have this warning, that we might remember how a parent's negligence destroyed his offspring.

Weak, sinful as we are, needing a Saviour as we

all do, what will our repentance be worth, where will be our hope, what trust shall we have in our last prayers for Christ's atoning mediation, if in our supplications, if when prostrate before the cross, the thought arises,—'Humble my own spirit as I may, break down my heart in sorrow, empty forth my soul in prayers for pardon, pour out as I may my failing strength in crying for what I need, the atonement of my God, still throughout the whole of my last spiritual struggle am I disheartened by the remembrance, made powerless in my efforts by the burden on my conscience, in that I know my sons, and my sons' sons, are dishonouring God, opposing His laws, wounding that Saviour to whom I would cry, and wounding Him because I neglected them; left them untaught, unheeding God, and sent them forth on their courses in a wicked world without the restraints of the fear of God, without prayer, without the supports of His grace?' This thought seems, as it were, enough even to stop the voice of that cry which throughout this life should be for ever rising, and in death should be the strongest and the most assured; it would seem almost enough, I mean, to stop the véry voice of prayer to God itself; for such a case would appear to hold up a memory of guilt, wherein the most unbounded, the most utterly unlimited extension of the infinite loving-kindness of the Lord Jesus Christ is needful to find a place for pardon and salvation.

SERMON XXVII.

Fourth Sunday after Easter.

ST. JAMES i. 19.

Let every man be swift to hear.

THE Word of God is very full of plain and powerful rules and directions, all of which, if observed, would, under God, enable us to correct our faults and to strengthen ourselves in good living; and these rules are usually found to be directly opposed to our natural feelings and habits of life. This fact stands among the many evidences of the sinful nature of man.

The text before us is an injunction taken from the Epistle which the Church has ordered for the Communion Service of this day, and it is an instance which supports the remark I have made. By nature we are swift to speak, slow to hear, especially if we are required to listen to the statement of our own faults and errors. Before I enter, however, on the injunction which the text lays on us, I wish, in a short way, to state to you what the occasion was which gave rise to this General Epistle of St. James; and having so done, I will then enter on one or two points which may shew us that on some important

doctrines of our religion we are not "swift to hear;" that our want of this readiness arises from the small power which the Holy Spirit possesses in the hearts of many, and, consequently, that the rule of the Lord Jesus Christ over His flock is shortened much more than it ought to be.

The Epistle General of St. James was written under the following circumstances. St. James, the son of Cleophas, who, according to the flesh, was not very remotely allied to the household of the Lord, addressed this Epistle to the Church of Christ at large from his see of Jerusalem, over which he was bishop. St. James is supposed to have outlived the crucifixion, and the ascent into heaven of our Lord Jesus Christ, about thirty years. He was put to death in a tumult raised by the unbelieving Jews in the year 62 after the birth of the Redeemer. At this time Jerusalem was not in a fixed state of government, because Festus, the Roman governor, was lately dead, and Albinos, his successor, had not yet arrived at Jerusalem to succeed him in his government. This Epistle is supposed to have been written in the year 61, that is, immediately before St. James was put to death. St. James is styled the Bishop of Jerusalem by very early Christian writers. There is indeed no doubt but he presided in that city in the character of bishop; and in a very important meeting, in which it was debated how far it was necessary to urge upon the Gentile converts the strict adherence to the laws of Moses, it is clear that the arguments

were summed up and the rule thereupon was laid down by St. James, in the character of bishop^a. Jerusalem, as the Church of Christ then stood, was the most important Church in Christendom; indeed, it was in a manner held to be the mother of the other Churches. St. James was advanced to this most eminent place immediately after the martyrdom of St. Stephen, and we may readily believe that his close connection with the family in which the Lord Christ appeared in the flesh may have been one of the leading reasons, which led to this selection. Some say that he was indeed appointed to this office by the Lord Jesus Himself. However this may be, his inflexible integrity and his holy zeal and self-denials, which procured for him the title of St. James the Just, appears to prove that he was elected by God's Providence out of the rest of the apostles to be the first bishop over the important see of Jerusalem.

The main intention of the General Epistle of St. James is to give force and strength to the true teaching and practice of the Gospels, in opposition to some very dangerous errors which began then to creep into the Church of the Lord God.

You are well aware that St. Paul's writings maintain very fully the doctrine that justification cometh by faith in Christ Jesus, and not by the works of the Law; meaning thereby, not by the works prescribed by the law of Moses, though, as we shall pre-

^a See Acts xv.

sently see, St. Paul's argument is equally true if it is applied also to the law of works as laid down by the Gospels of the Lord Jesus. Now this doctrine some of the Christian congregations had misinterpreted to mean that morality, pure, cleanly self-government, good and charitable works, upright dealing, a virtuous life in general, were not of value, or of any esteem in the sight of God. From this it arose that very irregular living in many congregations of the Church began to bring disgrace on Christianity and on the name of the blessed Jesus; souls were falling into danger, and heathen licentiousness was appearing in the Christian world. The great object of St. James in this Epistle is to correct this fearful misunderstanding. Accordingly, as you read it, you will perceive that while it advocates very warmly the value and saving power of a warm faith in Jesus the Lord, still that it insists with equal earnestness on the necessity of a religious and pious life, if we would fulfil our covenant with the Lord Jesus Christ, and would look forward with hope to salvation through that Saviour in whom we believe.

As a means whereby to keep our minds in a Christian state, to subdue ourselves to a humble spirit, to lead us to search out our own hearts, and so to bring us unto prayer for help, and thus to keep us in a holy tone of mind, striving always to abide in a strict obedience to God, St. James scatters throughout this Epistle many short but most saintlike and gracious portions of advice. As I have already said, these

admonitions, though very spiritual and wise, are nevertheless greatly opposed to our natural feelings. I have chosen one of these admonitions from the Epistle of the day, and as I proceed to remark on one or two points in which obedience to it is quite necessary to our spiritual welfare, we shall discover that it is an admonition very irksome to our habits and distasteful to our self-love.

“Let every man be swift to hear.” Now one topic on which the priesthood of the Lord Jesus very often address their flocks, is the natural corruption of the heart, the inborn tendency, the turning towards sin, which besets all men.

This great and most important truth is very seldom listened to with much attention; it is a point on which we are slow to hear. It is a sore wound to our self-love, it is galling to our pride to allow it to be established, as an undoubted truth, that we are extremely liable to sin; so liable, that it degrades our natures into many disgraces which we dread to confess, and hide and cloke even from our own thoughts; so liable, that it brings our souls into very great and continual spiritual danger. Yet there is nothing more undoubtedly true. It is a fact to be seen in every stage of life; it is a truth which we have to acknowledge every day; it is the great cause of a vast number of the evils and trials which beset us in this world; and it is the main reason why we all look forward to our death with awe and trembling, and usually consider all means to be at-

tempted by which we may delay ~~our~~ standing before the Lord our Judge, and may prolong our abode and our trials in this world of vexation and discomfort. When, indeed, we cast our eyes upon our neighbours, or even on the world at large, we do not then deny this general proneness, this turning towards sin, which stains mankind; but when each person hears this doctrine fully and plainly laid down and insisted on, he seldom applies it where the Church intends, and where the Book of God would fix it, directly upon his own heart. He does not say, as his priest would have him say, ‘“Lord, is it I?”’ It is far too true; I am very fond of sin, and thence it is that I am a grievous sinner! I am not safe when I am in temptation! Then far too often I am yielding to sin, and I am false to God! I do not resist Satan even so firmly as in the Lord’s grace I can; but I often demur a little, and then I make a faint resistance, and so I give myself over unto evil. This has been too much my course all the days that I have been upon the earth!’

Now this is the confession which the Church of the Lord would have to make in your hearts within when you hear this doctrine, because it is the truth. But it is very seldom you do make it there, because you are not “swift to hear” this point insisted on or forced home upon your consciences. Yet, my brethren, let me ask you each,—each looking over the course of your lives hitherto,—each, whether young or stricken in years,—is it not perfectly true?

is it not the exact description of your lives, that in temptation you are not safe, that you do feel a tendency to yield, a traitorous temper within, a treason so strong and so active that it is ready to make you betray yourselves, that it often has led you to betray yourselves, and which you acknowledge may so mislead you again? If we tell the truth, must we not join the patriarch, and say, "Few and evil have the days of the years of my life been^b?" Evil not only as full of sorrow, but as full of sin. Now if this is our condition, why will we not hear about it? Why will we not be warned against a tendency within, which makes us faithless, untrue, a tendency fatal, I may add, to our own eternal souls? Only because sin is so general within our hearts,—so many and so complete the number of our bad tempers, that they may be "named legion." And first among the ranks stands pride,—pride which will not bear to be rebuked. There is self-will, which must be powerful, and whose course must not be shortened. There is lust and appetite, which puts forth its claim for indulgence. The heart is full, the bosom is loaded with wicked imaginations and inclinations; the judgment is clouded over with the darknesses, the subtleties, the intricacies of Satan, until the man, in his readiness to sin, is full to overflowing; temptation after temptation finds an answer within, and the heart is greatly pre-occupied against the

^b Gen. xlvii. 9.

Spirit of the Lord. This makes man often to cast forth, either as an unnecessary doctrine, or as offensive, or as untrue, the great doctrine of the Church touching our inborn and very active inclination towards sin, which puts the soul of every one into great danger ;—a doctrine which, above most others, ought to lead us to very careful walking before God ; a doctrine which ought to humble us in spirit to the very dust, for it seems to bring us below the beasts that perish ; a doctrine which, plainly, ought to keep us constantly in prayer to Almighty God.

My brethren, let me admonish you in the Lord, that, whenever you hear that natural proneness to sin insisted on which besets you in the flesh, then never resist the doctrine ; take it into the heart, acknowledge it, and tremble : exactly in proportion as you find yourselves disposed to resist it and cast it behind you, in that very degree you are proving it true of your own hearts, and in that very degree is your spiritual danger manifested. Rather if, in God's mercy, your teachers are led to enlarge on this fearful truth, "let every man be swift to hear." Carry what they may say into your own breasts ; look within, and compare what they assert with what you see there ; and when you have discovered that there are unsafe points, that there are weak parts where Satan doth easily enter in, and where the soul finds a secret pleasure in admitting him, then the truth *must* burst upon you, you must feel that you are in

the common lot of all men, that sin is active and beloved, that you are weak, and that your heart is not right in the sight of God. Such a discovery as this ought to compel you to search the breast and to lay it open, that its fond sins may be seen, and may be rooted out. It ought to make you cast down any hope that in the arm of the flesh you can attain unto salvation; it ought to force you to throw aside self-righteousness, and to take up confession; to give up your trust in that "wall which is daubed with untempered mortar^c," whose breach is swelling out "ready to fall, and whose breaking cometh suddenly in an instant^d." Such a discovery should lead you to desert this "building on the sand," and to turn for safety to "the Corner-stone," the Foundation of your faith, the "Rock of Ages^e."

These remarks lead me, by a sort of natural consequence, to another doctrine on which the Church, through her priesthood, often insists, and commonly does not find you "swift to hear;" and that is the absolute necessity which befalls every man, that he must plead, "when he is judged," not his own good living, but his Redeemer's Blood. From what I have already said, nothing, I think, can be more clear than this; yet it is, in truth, a doctrine very seldom really accepted.

Every course of life, and every position in that

^c Ezek. xiii. 10.

^d Isa. xxx. 13.

^e Isa. xxvi. 4, marginal rendering.

course, has its own temptations. One of the temptations of an upright, virtuous course of life, and a temptation which becomes stronger, as we continue that course with constancy, is, that we esteem our progress too highly, that we value ourselves for our works' sake, and think that we are "going on from strength to strength^f." It may be indeed difficult for a man who is leading a regular and religiously ordered life, when he casts his eyes on the courses of his more wicked neighbours, not to feel some trust and expectation arising from his own estimation of his better life. When he observes the intemperate habits, perhaps, of one man; when he hears of the unclean practices of another; when he learns the hard dealings or the actual injustice of a third, and sees the open ungodliness and carelessness about holy things in a fourth; and when he can clearly acquit himself of all such crimes, then it may become a natural feeling that he should say, 'My course of life is in greater obedience to Christ, and therefore I may look for acceptance.' The unjustified Pharisee did this, and "he thanked God that he was not as other men are^g." He was measuring himself by the shortness of others, and forgetting that we must strive to be the "perfect man," to make our pattern "the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ^h." It is, however, a very natural and a very common feeling,—still, remember that

^f Ps. lxxxiv. 7.^g Luke xviii. 11.^h Eph. iv. 13.

this is the true description of it,—it is a natural, not a spiritual feeling.

On the other hand, I would by no means teach, nor can I anywhere read, that virtuous living, and a painful labour to obey the commandments of the Gospel of Christ, is useless or of small account; indeed, I would be bold to say that he who would tell you so, never knew, fully and truly, the Word of God. Everywhere we read that Christian living is one great and necessary condition on which our Lord and our Redeemer promises to plead His Cross as the atonement for His true and faithful followers, when they stand in their judgment before God. No doubt, in His infinite mercy, the Lord Christ may,—and, in many cases, it is our only room for hope and prayer, that He will,—by gracious conversions, and by quick and powerful repentances, recall at the last a hardened or an aged sinner within the verge of His pardon.

This is a mercy which, no doubt, the Lord can bestow. But the promises of the Gospel are never directed to hardened or aged sinners continuing in sin, the threatenings far rather; therefore the sinner adds presumption to his sinfulness, if he leans on such hopes as these. This is certain, that the soul which is careless of God's Word, which lives wilfully in disobedience, which undervalues or stifles religious movements, and boldly continues in such a course, in the careless thought that a final repentance and a gracious admission into peace will come at last,—such

a soul must, according to the truth of the Gospel, reckon herself at present among the outcasts, and if she was called away now, she would go forth an outcast ; and though infinite mercy may recall her before life's end, yet there are no Bible-reasons for supposing that God will do so ; and the longer her wicked course continues, the less do all such hopes become. The ordinary calls, the ordinary means of grace are graciously offered unto all alike. There is no Bible-promise that the extraordinary mercies, the extraordinary calls, are kept for the benefit of the obstinate and sinful, and that extraordinary pardons are held in store for extraordinary wickednesses.

Then remember, moreover, my brethren, that one great portion of the Gospel plan can only find its fulfilment in proportion as Christian living spreads upon the earth. How is "peace on earth"¹ to come, but by Christian living? Every sin does either indirectly hinder, or directly defeat, "peace on earth." Why is there the striving, why the oppositions, why the violences which we see in the world? Only because there is not Gospel obedience. How is there to be any "glory to God" in this world but by Christian living? What is it which will mar and shorten the glory of God here on earth, save sin? If this world is to disobey the Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ ; if it is to lie in wickedness ; if it is to be a place for rapine, for lust, for intemperance ; if

¹ Luke ii. 14.

falsehood may dwell here unrebuked, together with oppressions, and blasphemies ; where, in such a dark cloud of iniquities, would God's glory be seen ? Then the earth would be the kingdom of Satan, and to him would belong the dominion and power. So that whether it is to exalt the Name of the Lord, or to bring "on earth peace," or that each soul, individually, may walk hopefully in that safe path laid down which will lead her towards the pardon and salvation promised in the Lord, Christian living stands forth as the "one thing needful."

No wonder, then, if man, when he can claim to himself in any clear degree to be following a holier course than others follow, no wonder, I say, that he feels somewhat ready to depend upon it ; and when he hears the Church say that he must cast this down before the Cross, and plead it not, but pray unto Jesus, only and purely for the free grace and atonement, no wonder if in self-love the heart is in some degree ready to put this teaching somewhat aside, to turn fondly back again upon herself, and to lean somewhat upon her good works.

Yet, my brethren, this is an unscriptural error. It is, moreover, an error full of danger, because it brings with it an ungracious state of the soul. Look, my brethren, look at your good lives. Are they, strictly speaking, good ? God's justice is perfect ; that is, it is strict. Are you strictly good ? Certainly not. Every one is ready to smite upon his breast, and say, "I am an unprofitable ser-

vant^k.” But can the unprofitable servant, in strict right, claim the reward? Evidently he cannot. He must beg it as a grace.

Nor is this putting our spiritual condition by any means in too low a state, for the truth, beyond question, is that, so far from being able to boast of good lives, we cannot even boast of a single good day. “My friends, I have lost a day!” said the Roman emperor, when he could not recollect that he had done in it any good thing. In a more sacred meaning we may every day exclaim that we have lost a day. Every day finds us plenty of reasons to fall upon our knees, and to beg for forgiveness. “The spirit” may be “willing,” but “the flesh is weak^l.” The Lord Christ knew what was in man, and therefore bade us daily pray for the forgiveness of “our trespasses,” because every day would have sins to be forgiven. What sort of godliness then is this on which to build up hopes, and to trust that we may live for ever in the glory of the dwelling-place of the Lord God of Hosts? Certainly not godliness enough for that.

It is not enough in its mere quantity; the measure of it, the amount, is too short. I will not look at its quality as godliness. I will not ask about the single-mindedness, the purity, the spirituality of all our good works, (and these are considerations which will not make our good works appear to more advantage,)

^k Luke xvii. 10.

^l Matt. xxvi. 41.

but let me only take the simple amount of the best man's good works; let me suppose them all to be good and full of sanctity, and then I must say, "The measure is short, the measure is short!" In the words of St. Paul, my brethren, "We will not boast of things without our measure, but according to the measure of the rule which God hath distributed to us^m."

On these two doctrines then, my brethren, "be swift to hear;" the natural leaning, namely, in your own hearts towards sin against God, and the short and scanty measure of your obedience.

These, indeed, are not merely Gospel doctrines alone; though we must return thanks and praise to God that He has seen fit to place them in His Holy Word. Because finding them there, they are now beyond all denial and cavil; they stand forth as truths, lamentable indeed, but very and eternal truths, whence all men may learn what they are; how helpless, how worthless, how hopeless, save under Christ.

But they are also doctrines which, if they had not been fixed by God's Word as indisputable truths, would, and indeed have been discovered even by the poor and unassisted mind of man. When we are charged with a readiness to sin, when our best deeds are said to be small and imperfect, our hearts readily make answer, "Yea verily;" these are asser-

^m 2 Cor. x. 13.

but let me only take the simple amount of the best man's good works; let me suppose them all to be good and full of sanctity. and then I must say, "The measure is short, the measure is short!" In the words of St. Paul, my brethren, "We will not boast of things without our measure, but according to the measure of the rule which God hath distributed to us."

On these two doctrines then, my brethren, "be swift to hear;" the natural leaning, namely, to your own hearts towards sin against God, and the short and scanty measure of your obedience.

These, indeed, are not merely God's doctrines alone; though we must return thanks to God that He has seen fit to put them into His Word. Because finding them so short and scanty, beyond all denial and cavil, we are left in doubt but to that truths, lamentable indeed, as yet either that truths, whence all men are so far from it ought to be, and how helpless, how weak, how ignorant, with meek hearts and under Christ.

But they are also doctrines which have been fixed by God. He would, and none can change them. The poor and simple faith, without a pains-taking study of it, study it, learn it, let any one amongst us, let "swift," very "swift, to hear." l-faith, without a pains-taking Gospel, there must in every land

tions which we cannot and do not deny. They are natural as well as revealed truths.

But meeting them in the Book of God, and made, as they are, leading points in the Gospel scheme, how do they awaken and strengthen many Christian graces and practices within our hearts! How do they enforce upon us humbleness of spirit! How do they lead us to cleave unto Christ! With what a merciful power do they bring upon our hearts the fear of God! How do they defeat spiritual pride! With what a sense of the justice of the Lord God do they silence boasting, and banish away all high-mindedness! And instead of all this, they open the lips, and they pour forth the prayer, "Lord, deal not with us according to our sins; neither reward us according to our iniquities." On these two points then, my brethren, always "be swift to hear."

Lastly, if these remarks are true, if in our nature there is a plain and direct leaning towards sinfulness, if all our virtuous actions are in number too few, in worthiness too paltry, to entitle us to any eternal rewards as a matter of right, how cautious ought we to be never to repel the gracious calls and admonitions which our Redeemer in His mercy continually sends into our consciences; if cling to Him we must, every one, the very best amongst us, for our salvation, how carefully ought we to guard our course so as never to lead Him to withdraw Himself from us, so as never by our own wilfulness in vice, by our own indifference and coldness in re-

ligion, or our own heedlessness or neglect of His ordinances, to banish Him, our only Righteousness, from our own hearts.

If, however, the case is that we are heedless, that we are vicious, that we turn away from His ordinances, which is the case of many who fondly call themselves Christians, then what anxiety is too great that we may recover the grace of God again under the guidance of His Holy Spirit, may walk again in hope when we think of judgment, supported in faith, and unfailing in prayer?

My brethren, these remarks will find a resting-place in the bosom, a consent in the mind of every one of you who is really a Gospel-reader, and who stands firm in Gospel-faith; but if to any one they are distasteful, if the heart kicks against them, if you heed them not, or if you would cast them behind you, if they are to you without "a savour of life unto lifeⁿ," then there is no doubt but to that soul God's word has not been as yet either that guide or that comfort which it ought to be, and which it will be to all that "with meek hearts and due reverence" truly accept it, study it, learn it, and inwardly digest it.

If this is the case with any one amongst us, let that unhappy spirit "be swift," very "swift, to hear." Without a firm Gospel-faith, without a pains-taking obedience to the Gospel, there must in every land

ⁿ 2 Cor. ii. 16.

be sin ; without these graces there must in every heart be sin, and that, too, in spite of all the Christian calls which it may have had ; and whether we limit God's Word to this world, or extend it, we shall find it to be a great truth, a fearful warning, a warning directed to every one of us ; and if we will in grace consider our ways, and reflect, a warning very terrible to many amongst us, when God proclaims, "There is no peace to the wicked ° !"

° Isa. lvii. 21.

SERMON XXVIII.

Fifth Sunday after Easter.

DEUTERONOMY ix. 23, 24.

When the Lord sent you from Kadesh-barnea, saying, Go up and possess the land which I have given you; then ye rebelled against the commandment of the Lord your God, and ye believed Him not, nor hearkened to His voice. Ye have been rebellious against the Lord from the day that I knew you.

IT has been very commonly a part of the plan of the Lord God to demand of man obedience in faith, before He would bestow blessings. Very often the Lord will require only something to be done which may seem in our eyes to be trifling, sometimes He will order what may appear contrary to common sense; but unless the things ordered be done, unless the trifle, as we may deem it, is accomplished, unless our own common sense or reason, as we may call it, is made to bow down, and to obey humbly, the blessing is not granted. In every case, if we say, 'This ordinance is so small or so useless that I shall overlook it and neglect it,' then the blessing is withheld till the ordinance, however small we may esteem it, has been fulfilled.

No doubt, in the sight of the Lord God, every one of our actions, whether they are actions which we

consider great or small, are the most absolute and insignificant trifles, except in their character of obedience or disobedience; that, no doubt, is the sole quality which gives them any real consequence. No doubt the smallest movement of the most weak and most paltry insect is a far greater event in our eyes than our most important action can be in the sight of God. The insect, as far as we are concerned with it, acts of its own will; we do not foresee, nor do we govern its movements; but in the eye of the Lord all our actions are fore-known, we move and act under His permission, and only by His will; and nothing which we can do can ever influence His conduct, or alter His course in the government of the worlds or the plan of His providence. I do not mean to say that all our actions are the same in the sight of God in all their consequences; they are not the same as regards ourselves. As regards God the Lord, they are the same in their value and importance, that is, they are so small that they are unto the Lord of no importance at all; but as regards ourselves, they are very different in their effects, because some are actions of obedience, some of disobedience; and this difference, though of no consequence whatever to Almighty God, is of such infinite consequence to us, that it is that which will, either through the mercy and atonement of Christ, carry us into the glories and eternal blessings of God's own dwelling-place, or will sink us into the never-ending punishments of the pit. In short, all the course of our lives is

brought under one of two questions,—Are we obedient in faith, or are we disobedient? And on the answers to these questions our salvation or our condemnation hangs.

I will mention some of the instances of obedience which it has seemed good to the Lord to require of men, both in the times of the Israelites, in times also before Israel was, and in later times also; and will shew that all these instances were and are trifles in the sight of God, as far as God the Lord is affected by them, but that nevertheless the most momentous consequences, as far as the welfare of mankind is concerned, have depended on the fulfilment of them.

The first instance of obedience which the Lord God required of man was, that the fruit of one tree should not be eaten. Every fruit save one was given unto man to eat; one only was withheld. This denial was nothing in amount. We daily, as we know, pass by the fruits of numerous plants, and have no thought or desire to taste them; indeed, now we eat very few fruits, for the world has received her curse from the mouth of God, so that many things are less wholesome to us, and many are hurtful. This ordinance, then, was nothing in amount. It might well seem a trifle; but disobedience to this command brought sin into the world, and so has brought the soul of every man into the danger of hell. Doubtless, when Eve was tempted, the eating one apple seemed to her a little action, but because

it was disobedience to a commandment, all mankind fell under the curse of God.

Now let us take another instance. The Lord commanded Noah to build an ark, and to save himself, his wife, his children, and every living thing, from a flood which was to come upon the earth.

This seems in our eyes an immense undertaking, and with a most momentous object in view. It seems a gigantic work for one man, and those about him, to build so vast a vessel that it should contain two of every living thing, and all things needful for their support for an extended period; a work so gigantic, that at first sight we think we never could execute such a work. The consequence also of this work seems to us extremely momentous, being nothing less than the keeping alive the race of man, and every other living thing upon the earth. To us the work itself, and the consequences of the work, seem to be of the greatest importance. In the sight of the Lord, however, it is still only the same question,—obedience in faith, or disobedience. If Noah believed and obeyed, the world was peopled afresh, and all living things were preserved after their kind. If Noah had made answer, ‘How shall I build this vast ship? how shall I bring the different creatures to come up into it? how can I maintain them when I have got them there? I cannot undertake all this; I do not suppose it is really the will of God that I should do such things; most likely there will be no flood; I shall do as all the

world does ;' if Noah had said thus, then we may believe the world would have perished. But unto God the Lord the consequence would have been as nothing ! The Lord, with the Word of His mouth, would, had He so pleased, have restored every thing again. " Let there be man, let there be living things again," and every thing would be seen as before upon the earth. These two events, one of which we should deem a small and trifling transaction, the other which in human eyes is a vast undertaking, are neither, therefore, matters of magnitude in the sight of God, save only as they are each in themselves questions of obedience in faith, or disobedience.

We may see the same course of government continued in God's dealings with mankind. I will mention two instances in the history of the Israelites ; and again, one shall be, what we should call a small thing to do, the other a matter of vast labour, and of vast results in human eyes.

Among the plagues of Egypt the Lord sent boils and blains upon all that people. What previous instance of obedience on the side of the Jews did the Lord require ? He commanded Moses to take a handful of fine ashes from the furnace, and to scatter them towards heaven, " and it shall be a boil breaking forth with blains throughout all the land of Egypt^a." Moses did so, and the plague burst forth upon them. Now suppose Moses had lacked

^a Exod. ix. 8.

faith ; suppose he had said, 'This is far too unlikely ! I know a little handful of ashes will never make a plague of boils. The wind many a time and oft has scattered, not a handful only, but clouds of ashes toward heaven, but no blains appeared. This I cannot believe, and I cannot make myself ridiculous in the eyes of the people by such a proceeding !' If Moses had reasoned thus, and had not scattered the ashes, we must conclude that there would have been no boils, nor would he have delivered Israel. Nevertheless he would have reasoned very naturally. Furnace ashes do not make plagues of boils, but the will of God does. Still in this case the Lord chose to demand obedience, and obedience shewn in a small and feeble work, before He would put forth His hand to smite the Egyptians.

The next instance which I will mention is what we call a great event, and distinct reference is made to it in the text. You will find a full account of it in the thirteenth and fourteenth chapters of the Book of Numbers. The Lord had commanded the Israelites to pass over Jordan and to invade the kingdom of Canaan, to make war upon the people, and to destroy them utterly from off the face of the earth, and then to enter in and possess themselves of the land. This appeared a difficult work to perform. Their cities were defended with the strongest walls, they were said to be "fenced up to heaven^b." The

^b Deut. ix. 1.

inhabitants were all accustomed to war, having frequent contests in their own country. The country itself was mountainous, and easy to be defended, and there was, moreover, the river Jordan to be crossed. So difficult indeed was the work, that the Lord saw fit to promise expressly that He would also fight for Israel. He commanded them to fear not, but to be very courageous, for He assured them that "He went with them, to fight for them against their enemies, to save them^c."

Now this whole transaction ranks among the great events, as we call them, in the history of mankind. It seems to us a great event that one people should thus invade and overrun many nations, should root them out utterly, should destroy their religion and their laws, and establish in their country fresh laws, and a religion entirely the contrary to that which they had overturned. It seems to us a great event that cities after cities should be subdued, and that a very powerful race of men should have been altogether cut off. In our eyes it may very well seem a great event, because, without God to aid, it would never have been done. The Israelites, without the assistance of the Lord, could not have thrown down the walls of Jericho, most probably they would have been destroyed before that town. Without the aid of God, the Israelites could not have destroyed the inhabitants of Canaan; they could not have stood

^c Deut. xx. 4.

before the children of Anak; and in all their struggles with the wicked Canaanites, the Lord, except when provoked by some great sin on the part of His people, came down into the battle and “fought for Israel^d.” In our eyes these events appear great, and in one sense greater than any other, because upon them was founded securely the religion of the Israelites, which was then the Church of God on earth, and out of that Church, in God’s good time, arose the purer faith of the Lord Jesus Christ, His Church as it now stands in the world, and the wider and still spreading triumphs of the Word of God over the idolatrous deccits of Satan. In our eyes, therefore, these are great events.

In the eye of the Lord they are, each in themselves, as nothing. The Lord had willed that Israel should root out Canaan, and that the name and worship of the true God should be set up in that land. This might have been done by one word from heaven. As the Lord overthrew the guilty cities of the plain, so He might have overthrown the country of the Canaanites; by fire and brimstone, by earthquakes, by the pestilence, by “storm and tempest fulfilling His word,” by the angel who smote the hosts of the Assyrians, by the mere words, “Let Canaan perish^e,” the country might have been destroyed, the Israelites might have gone into an empty land, they might have possessed it in peace, and the

^d Joshua x. 14.

^e See Wisdom xii. 9.

worship of the most high God might have been set up with none to oppose it.

All this might have been the speedy course of the Lord God with the sinful Canaanites; but it was His will to order otherwise. The Lord would have the labour of the Israelites also. All that Israel could do amounted in truth to nothing. It was the Lord who brought all "the mighty works to pass." Israel was warned not to boast himself, but to remember that "they got not the land in possession through their own sword, neither did their own arm save them^f,"—he was cautioned that it was the Hand of God alone. Nevertheless the Lord would not do anything without Israel. Poor as was their strength, nothing as was their work, nevertheless the Lord would have it; and would have it in the way, neither more nor less, than that which He commanded.

Let us now, by God's grace, endeavour to apply these remarks to ourselves.

First, then, we may believe that the Lord will have our labours also. No doubt they are in themselves as poor as the strength of Israel was. The enemy with which we have to contend is sin. Sin is spread, as the Canaanites were, through the length and breadth of the land. It is established. The false gods of Satan are set up everywhere, and the power of sin is established. We have ourselves all felt it, we have each been in subjection to it; very

^f Ps. xliv. 3.

a soul must, according to the truth of the Gospel, reckon herself at present among the outcasts, and if she was called away now, she would go forth an outcast ; and though infinite mercy may recall her before life's end, yet there are no Bible-reasons for supposing that God will do so ; and the longer her wicked course continues, the less do all such hopes become. The ordinary calls, the ordinary means of grace are graciously offered unto all alike. There is no Bible-promise that the extraordinary mercies, the extraordinary calls, are kept for the benefit of the obstinate and sinful, and that extraordinary pardons are held in store for extraordinary wickednesses.

Then remember, moreover, my brethren, that one great portion of the Gospel plan can only find its fulfilment in proportion as Christian living spreads upon the earth. How is "peace on earth"ⁱ to come, but by Christian living? Every sin does either indirectly hinder, or directly defeat, "peace on earth." Why is there the striving, why the oppositions, why the violences which we see in the world? Only because there is not Gospel obedience. How is there to be any "glory to God" in this world but by Christian living? What is it which will mar and shorten the glory of God here on earth, save sin? If this world is to disobey the Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ; if it is to lie in wickedness; if it is to be a place for rapine, for lust, for intemperance; if

ⁱ Luke ii. 14.

triumph when the "Lord went forth with their armies." It may seem strange to us that the Lord Christ should require our warfare, that He should demand our struggles against sin, when they are so weak as to be worth nothing. It may seem strange that the Lord's command should be,—'I will have from every defeated and vanquished sinner his service in My host; he shall come forth and fight against Satan, or I will be no Saviour unto him. Though I well see that he has been vanquished over and over again, though I know that he is worth nothing in the battle, nevertheless, come he shall.'

There are, however, many reasons to be given why the Lord will have our poor and defeated strength, or will leave us to perish; but one reason will be sufficient at present.

We may be worth nothing as soldiers of the Lord; we may be weak and paltry; who will say that he is not? in the day of battle we may be shifting and yielding; we may glide away like the stream,—“unstable as water, we shall not excel^h :” still, the Lord Christ will have us enrolled in His army, or He will leave us to be destroyed, because He will have our souls to be exercised in goodness; our minds, our wills must be brought to fight on His side; though we have indeed no power, though help from us God cannot receive, though our hands are palsied, and as nothing at all, still He will have our

^h Gen. xlix. 4.

hearts while they beat. This is reason enough. Now let us see how we are to fight.

One great Gospel command is that we must be constant in prayer that Christ will be with us. An unbeliever will say, 'What can be the use of such prayers? If Christ has determined to be with us, He will be at hand whether we pray or not; if He has fixed that He will not be ready to aid us, all our prayers will never bring Him. What can prayer do in such a case?' Let us ask another question, When the Israelites came into Canaan, the first thing which opposed them was the city Jericho. The walls of this town were so strong that they could not overthrow them, they were all so high that they could not scale over them; the place was full of armed men, so that they could not go by and leave them behind them. They were brought to a full stop. What was the commandment of the Lord? They were commanded to march round Jericho and blow the trumpets, and then they were told that the walls should fall flat of their own accord. They obeyed, and the walls fell! Does any one think that the sound of the trumpets threw down the wall? No; but it was the will of God. Well, but the Lord could have thrown down the city wall without the sound of any trumpet at all. Certainly He could. The trumpets gave no help to the arm of the Lord; but the Lord would have Israel do something before He bestowed the victory. The something which Israel did was indeed, in power, nothing. So what

we can do is, in power, nothing; we never can value our own strength or our own worthiness at too low a rate; nevertheless, we must live after the commands and after the example of Christ, or we shall be lost.

We have not faith to believe that our weak prayers, coming from wicked hearts, will have power to turn the Lord God Almighty in His courses? But is there nothing which our prayers may not turn? May they not turn our own hearts? May they not turn them towards God? Weak, poor, blind, wrong as they may be, when they pour forth prayer, they will lean that way; and when we come unto God, He will in no wise cast us outⁱ! The Lord will have our hearts, and our hearts moreover full of prayer, or He will not have us. The blast of the trumpet could not shake one stone in the walls of Jericho; it never, indeed, shook one poor weak weed, one blade of grass growing on the wall top; still God would have this useless sound, because it bent down the heart of Israel, and it made him obey. It is the same now; our prayers may be weak,—(never think them mighty things, my brethren, neither think so of anything which you may do in the way of godliness,)—still we must offer up our prayers, such as they are. The Lord, who sees everything, sees and hears the heart that prays. “Behold, he prayeth^k,” is the word which gives joy unto the

ⁱ John vi. 37.

^k Acts ix. 11.

angels which be in heaven ; but to the heart which will not pray there is no God throughout the length and the breadth of the whole world ; no God to help ; to the heart that will not pray, the Lord is both blind and deaf ; and all that is about that deserted soul is sin, strong and high ; sins flourishing and many ; sins like Anak's sons, mighty in stature, sure to conquer him, sure to carry him away into captivity and destruction.

Who then, my brethren, does live in this constant prayer to Christ ? Who beseeches Jesus to be his continual helper and guide ? It is the first step in Christian warfare ; if this step is not taken, nothing is done as yet ; if it is not taken with the utmost humbleness of heart, with the utmost self-abasement and repentance for sin, nothing is done. Who, then, has taken this step in godliness, and still advances ? It is a most searching question, because the answer to it fixes you where you are as yet, whether you are wandering in the wilderness, in the midst of the sins of Satan's kingdom, or whether you are standing in the ranks of God.

Lastly, some may say, 'I have striven to be with the Lord, I have striven in my prayers, I have striven in my works to be with the Lord. But still my spirit beareth witness against me, and accuseth me of sin ! Woe is me, my prayer is not acceptable in the sight of God !' This is the cry of many a sinner, but there is no reason for it. The Lord oftentimes will "hide Himself" to try our

faith. God "tarrieth," He "delayeth His coming," to prove our constancy. Seldom doth He grant all our petitions at once.

When Jericho was taken by Israel, and when "the people went up into the city¹," the Lord commanded that they should compass the city about, not for one day, but for seven; and that on the seventh day they should compass it, not once only, but seven times, ere they shouted, and the walls fell. Why all this observance? Because it was the will of the Lord. The compassing of the city was nothing; neither did the shouts cast down the city wall, but the will of the Lord God of Israel. Why all this observance, this delay? Only to try the faith of Israel, only to prove their constancy. Does any one think, if the people of Israel had said, 'How shall a trumpet throw down the walls, which are too mighty for us to pull down? How shall a shout lay open a city which our whole strength cannot enter? Why must we parade about it seven whole days, and be the laughing-stock of them that sit upon the wall? Why must we compass it seven times on the seventh day? These orders are against common sense, and we will not obey.' Does any one think that then the walls would have fallen at the feet of Israel? Certainly not. Nevertheless, the shouts were nothing, the trumpets were nothing, the seven times were nothing, nothing as to strength and power; but they

¹ Joshua vi. 20.

were everything as to faith, as to obedience, as to patience. They were all trials of the faith which was in Israel. Oftentimes the Lord requires the sense of man to bow down before His order. Often that which we cannot understand is commanded. Why is this, save to prove our obedience and our faith? The Lord God, beyond doubt, could make it all plain; but He does not; and why not? Merely, we may well believe, to prove us, to make us examples unto other men, examples of faithful obedience, without knowing why, and having no other than the humble reason to offer,—“God has commanded it, therefore I do it.” Oftentimes, therefore, the Lord may delay, and (as at Jericho) He may require sevenfold labours, on the day of His hearing perhaps He may have the labour seven times told, and, “Lo! He cometh.” Why came not the Lord God before? Because He would have in us patterns of patience and faith in the sight of man hereafter.

Never, then, let a heart in prayer despair. It is on the sure road. The road may seem long, but at the end of it are the gates of heaven. A single step in a journey of a hundred miles seems nothing; after a single prayer the answer perhaps seems no nearer; heaven appears as far off as ever; nevertheless every step shortens the journey, every sincere prayer does bring us nearer to God. Consider, my brethren, consider, and ask yourselves. Can you expect that Christ the Son of God should hear at once? Can you expect that He should answer as soon as you cry? Look at

your lives ! What sin there is ! What offences ! How often have we wounded Christ our Redeemer afresh and afresh ! How often have we turned our backs upon the Cross ! How often slighted and cast aside the Blood of Christ, and wilfully gone forward in insult and iniquity ! Is it wonderful if the Lord delays ? Is it wonderful if God proves the spirit ? Is it wonderful if the Lord Jesus first will make you purify yourselves in repentance, if He will make you cleanse your souls in self-searching and in self-accusation, if He will make you strengthen yourselves in earnest prayers, in painful supplications, in long-repeated humiliations, and in much fear ? Is it any wonder at all, if this course is required of the sinner, before the Lord will arise out of His mercy-seat, and say, "Lo ! I come ?"

"But, my brethren, is it right to expect that the Holy Spirit should fully enter into the heart till this has been done ? Till Anak and his rebellious sons are driven forth, how shall the ark of the covenant rest there ? Satan is as Anak unto us ; his sins and temptations are as the sons of Anak. Mighty they are, giant sins, able to overcome us and enslave us ! How shall we stand before them, when "in controversy we shall stand in judgment"^m ?" How shall we disperse them, and make them flee away, and gain our free passage into our promised land ? Only by the sword of the Spirit ; and how is that to be

^m Ezek. xliv. 24.

gained but by the power of prayer? This is the promise of God, and it is certain to be fulfilled. Seven times we may cry unto the Lord, seven times seven we may cry, and "there is none to answer." If until "seventy times seven" we "lifted up our voice in vain," where would be the wonder? Let us think upon our sins, my brethren, and where would be the wonder?

But we shall not call so long, nor will our labour be so hard. Be sincere in your prayers, let them arise out of a self-searching heart, out of a perception of your sinfulness; let them spring out of the knowledge of your danger, out of your trust in the fatherly kindness of the Lord, out of your thankful belief that "He is not willing that any should perish^a." Let this be the ground and the beginning of your prayers; and then, in the firm determination to walk in obedience to the law of God, and to thwart the Spirit of the Lord no more, put up your prayers to God to come and help you, and Christ will hearken. Hope will arise within you, comfort will enter, strength will come; more and more you will be in the power of the Lord, and you will go on to conquer more and more.

O the depth of the mercy of God, of His loving-kindness, of His surpassing goodness! that sinners who repent and pray should have the promise given them, should have the power, built upon that promise,

^a 2 Pet. iii. 9.

to call the very Spirit of the Lord God to visit their hearts with power and purification in Jesus Christ. Let not then the multitude of your sins stop you, neither let their magnitude affright you. But take the promise into thankful hearts, and tread down despair. Though, like the sons of Anak, your sinful habits be giants, still go up against them in the strength of the Lord; go up against them in firm resolution to be servants of God in time to come; go up in deep and true repentance; go up in earnest and continual prayer, and lo, through Christ, the promised land is opened unto you, and you shall go up into heaven!

SERMON XXIX.

Sunday after Ascension.

DEUTERONOMY xiii. 3.

Thou shalt not hearken unto the words of that prophet, or that dreamer of dreams: for the Lord your God proveth you, to know whether ye love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul.

THESE words shew us that after the Lord had chosen Israel to be His people, He permitted them to be tried by temptation in order to prove them. The temptation which seemed the most likely to lead Israel away from God was the idolatry of the nations who dwelt round about them, because all people are easily persuaded to follow the practices of any neighbouring nation; and also because the worship offered to the idols permitted many impurities and sensual practices, which were in agreement with the base appetites of our natural hearts. So that the temptation which was to beset Israel was one of the most ensnaring in its nature which could perhaps befall them.

The Lord God therefore forewarns Israel against it. It is foretold to them by Moses that among the priests of the idols, prophets, or dreamers of dreams, should arise, who should foretell some "sign," or perform some "wonder," and that these "signs and

wonders" might "come to pass," and these might seem to prove that the prophet was a true prophet, and that his idol was a true god, so that Israel might be tempted to worship at the false altar, and being led away by the multitudes and the example of the heathen, and enticed by the lusts of his own heart, might depart from the pure worship of God, and from that self-denial and holy living which the Lord commanded. The Lord therefore warned His people beforehand, that they should "not hearken unto the words of that prophet," for that he was not a true prophet, but was permitted to speak truly in that instance; and the "sign" and the "wonder" were allowed to come to pass, only to prove Israel, whether indeed "he did love the Lord his God" with all his heart and with all his soul.

I need not stay here to shew you that these false prophets did come and infest Israel; you all know that Israel was not stedfast, but that he fell away from God; and that not once or twice only, but very often; and moreover that not one here, and another there, a few only among the people, turned from God, but that they who cleaved unto the Lord were the few, "the remnant," and that they who "started aside" were the many, the nation; so that the Lord is frequently seen, in their history, to drive His people into captivity, and to make them the slaves and the bondmen of the heathens, whose gods they worshipped.

This is, I believe, the meaning of the first three

verses with which the Lesson begins which is read to us by the Church to-day. There is more teaching in these three verses than one sermon can contain ; let me, however, by God's help, endeavour to place some of it before you, that you may, in the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, take into your hearts some of that spiritual wealth which the holy Church of Jesus lays before you in the worship appointed for this day. But first, we ought, my brethren, to thank God that among all the mistakes and errors which there are in these days, in despite of falsities in worship and "dreamers of dreams," still the Lord is not yet weary of us, but that He doth, as indeed His promise is, still continue to uphold His Church, and that He doth still keep her among you to dispense among you His sacred Word, and to lay before you Sabbath after Sabbath these rich lessons, which, taken into your hearts, will reprove their evil nature, will faithfully chastise sin, and will lead you in trust and in fear to follow after God's laws even unto the end, when for Christ's sake and in His Name redemption cometh.

One thing, then, which these verses teach us is, that after we are called, still we are tried. "We are proved" whether we "love the Lord our God with all our heart." This therefore teaches us that a call into a state of grace is one thing, and that the final pardon and salvation of the Lord at the last day is another thing. It warns us that after we are called we are tried, and that in our trials we may fall away.

Now of course Scripture will agree with Scripture; and so we see that this doctrine, which was given to the Jews from the Lord by Moses, was given unto us by Christ the Lord Himself. The Lord Jesus commands us that whenever we pray unto God, that we beseech Him to "lead us not into temptation," but "to deliver us from evil;" so that it is of the will of the Lord, now as heretofore, that His people are tried; and as it was formerly, so now in the latter days, it is of the purpose of God that we be proved whether or not we be faithful.

We have, however, the assurance that if we are faithful servants of the Lord, and if we abide constant in prayer, that, although Satan finds an evil joy in tempting us to sin, and has a wicked hope that in this way he may largely destroy souls, and may lessen the wideness of Christ's salvation; still the Lord God, by His infinite wisdom and power, will control each temptation, while He permits it to try us, and after giving us commandments and warnings, will suffer us to be tried, (yet not beyond our strength^a;) in order that we may prove our sincerity towards God, may strengthen our souls against the craftiness of our enemy, and may be an example to other men to follow our course, and, under Christ, to be strong in the same firmness.

This teaches us, my brethren, why good works, or, which is the same thing, why obedience to the laws

^a See 1 Cor. x. 13.

of the Gospel is so strictly demanded of us, not only by the Lord our God in all His teaching throughout the Gospels, but also by the blessed saints, Paul and Peter, James and John, and all the first writers in the Church of God. This shews us some of the reasons why obedience is demanded in the latter covenant quite as strongly as it is in the Old Testament. Because it is, as the text says, "the proof." Good sayings many a smooth sinner may give unto God and man. High thoughts, fine feelings, spiritual words and sentences, many a crafty deceiver has uttered forth from a well-stored memory and with a well-framed face; but constant and willing obedience to all God's laws in every trial nothing can give, as an example to the Church, but a heart strong in faith, full of truth, and constant in prayer. Therefore it is at once a pattern and a proof. It shews what can be done in God's service, and also how to do it. The obedience, indeed, may be worth nothing; it may be, it will be, a very poor, and a very short obedience; it will be like the commanded obedience which a child shews to its parent; every limb shaking, perhaps, while the little work is being done, and the little work—nothing; a work not of the least value in itself, but of great acceptance in the mercy of God as a proof of a willing and obedient spirit, of great worthiness in the sight of man, as being unto man an example of godliness. The parent, when he sees the infant child setting about the little task which he has commanded, smiles over him;

he smiles at the littleness of that which he has ordered, and he smiles over the earnest obedience which the infant shews; these last are very gracious smiles, for they come out of his love of the child; the child has proved his young obedience, and the parent loves him for it. In the same way, only far more tenderly, my brethren, does the Lord Christ look down upon His "obedient children^b." He commands us that we be as "little children^c." In the amount of our obedience we shall never be more. All our best deeds and our fullest righteousness will never be anything more in the sight of God than the little trifling observances of a dutiful child. Neither, if we have humble and thoughtful hearts, will they ever be reckoned more, nor yet so much, even in our own eyes. We shall never be more than children in the amount of our obedience. God grant, my brethren, that we may be indeed as "little children!" Happy for us if we are! For then our gracious Father, while He smiles in a pardoning spirit over the work performed, will smile in loving-kindness over the willing spirit that did it. We shall have given our best proof that we reverence His Word and law, that we put our trust in Him, that we love to serve Him; and His own unspeakable love to us will grow warmer and stronger, new strength and fresh comforts will be given unto us, and we shall be what the Bible calls "the children of God^d."

^b 1 Pet. i. 14.^c Matt. xviii. 3.^d See Rom. viii. 14.

This is the value of our obedience and our good living towards ourselves ; not that the Lord our God is made thereby the greater, nor that by our small and paltry labours in the vineyard the Lord thereof is made more rich ; but that by His grace we ourselves are enriched,—we are made better,—we are made better by the denying our own lusts, by the receiving God's graces sent of His free mercy into our hearts ; and though the Lord God remains only where He was, and ever will be, far above us unalterably enthroned in glory, nevertheless we are, by our self-chastisements, by our exercises in good, exalted somewhat more towards the Lord, and approach nearer unto Him in our spirits.

Next, we learn that if the Lord suffers temptations to visit us, these trials happen by the will of God ; and the Lord Himself in some degree is in them. Satan, no doubt, is permitted to plan the snare, to dress it up, and lay the bait for the soul. No doubt he hopes by his evil industry that he may destroy it, and may rob the Lord Christ of one of His redeemed ; but the Lord God sees his work, and allows it to visit us and try us ; and is, to that amount, in the trial. There is no doubt of this, because we are told that “with every temptation, the Lord will make a way for us to escape, that we may be able to bear it^e.” So that the Lord is always at hand, and, in every temptation, leaves not Satan free to use his

utmost power against us, but while we are placed by our enemy in danger, God mercifully makes a safe path for them that are faithfully walking in "His stedfast fear and love."

This, my brethren, is a very comforting proof of the love of the Lord Jesus towards His flock. While sin is in the world Christ watches it, and wherever it is busy Jesus draws near: the Shepherd seeks His sheep; He leaves them not to the ravenous beast, but He prepares for the coming of the wolf, and makes a safe place. The Eye of the Lord Christ looks down from the glory and the purity of heaven, and turns itself away, to look into the foul and sinful scenes of this world, and to assist and guide the souls that are willing to follow after God. Scenes, my brethren, there are, and doings, from which a good and pure-minded man will turn loathing away; scenes from which wisely, and in a holy Christian fear, he will withdraw, lest he might be ensnared, might fall away, and might dishonour his call to godliness. But in these wickednesses, unseen, and mostly by the multitude unfelt, in the midst of these vicious scenes, sorrowing and wounded afresh, walks Jesus Christ; still touching the hearts of tempted sinners, shewing them their vices, reminding them of the wrath and punishment to come; and up to the last moment, even until the sin is actually committed, recalling the sinner, and warning him to escape the stain. Seldom, my brethren, nay, never, as I believe, in the scenes of temptation, is the tempted soul left "without

witness^f” from God; never, till the soul has so often cast out the Spirit that the Holy Ghost, at last “wearied with iniquities^g,” leaves it reprobate. But in the gaudiest and most bewitching hours of sin, when Satan has allured the soul by all his tinsel, and dressed up all his evil practices with his mock gilding and empty paint; when he has filled the world’s gay company with bold delight and joyous merriment, or tempted the deluded soul with honours, where the bribe is deeply hidden, and most adroitly covered,—still is the Lord Jesus Christ in the midst of them, still checking and drawing off the soul that is not yet hard and wilful; taking it aside, giving it a second thought, if haply it will hearken; lifting up unto it some corner of the curtain, and shewing behind it that raging fire where the worm dieth not. He is a Redeemer always, and, as He hath promised, a Saviour unto them that “will love life^h.”

My brethren, is not this a truth which every one of us can speak to? When you have been in any temptation, in any trial, have not your hearts been reminded? As the Lord has allowed the temptation to try you, to prove you, in order to increase your strength and your constancy, so also has He not always “made a way to escapeⁱ,” if you would enter it? Have you not been reminded, warned, put on your guard, called off from the sin, and been tenderly admonished to keep with Jesus? My brethren, who warned you? who called you? Your Saviour

^f Acts xiv. 17. ^g Isa. xliii. 24. ^h 1 Pet. iii. 10. ⁱ 1 Cor. x. 13.

Christ! Doubtless we have not always obeyed, we have not always come when we were called; that confession, doubtless, we have all to make, and I suppose, therefore, that repentance with prayers is now the only safe course for the feet of any one of us. Humbly and diligently may we all walk therein.

But though we came not, still we were called to come, and in every temptation called we were, and we felt that we were called, and that the call, moreover, came from Christ. And whether in the busy and flaunting vanities of the world, or in the hidden and the secret stains and pollutions of sin, or in the hot and angry contentions, or in the loud and intemperate excesses of unruly passions, or in the sly and false dealings of deceit, in every kind of temptation to sinfulness, in every trial of our steadfastness, we have felt a check. A warning, a remembrance has been sent to us; a place and a time to escape away has been shewn and made for us; and we have felt of a surety that it would lead us straight to God. I know, my brethren, that at such times many a soul has said, 'Yes, this is the path, and it will lead me into peace; it will carry me away from my temptation, and I shall be with Jesus; but I will not walk therein; I will sin now, and will have Satan's pleasure, and I will take my chance for a hereafter.' I know that this is a common thing. But what does that rash soul feel? He feels that he follows his fleshly heart of his own will, he feels that he puts his hand into Satan's hand, and suffers him

to lead him away into wickedness; he feels that he grieves the Lord Jesus Christ, and that he turns his back upon Him. He feels these things; and these are the things which make the greatness of his sin. But still is there not the Lord at hand to save him in every temptation, if he will be obedient to His voice? Tried, tempted, he is not left to perish. In every assault of the enemy Christ will be found at hand also. He does "not leave us nor forsake us^k," but is with us; and if the prodigal son will come "from the husks and from the swine" of sin, and will leave his pollutions, and "return unto his Father," lo! "while he is yet a great way off His Father seeth him, and hath compassion, and runneth, and falleth upon his neck, and kisseth him^l."

Lastly, as the Jews were tempted by the idolatrous customs of those who dwelt round about them, so we must expect that the temptations which visit us will be the evil practices of our companions and acquaintances. Perhaps these evil practices will seem to be prosperous; perhaps we may see wicked men flourishing, no punishment following them, no harm overtaking them. Very likely there may be many who will praise us when what we purpose in our hearts is not upright, pure, or merciful; there may be many who will blame us for not walking in the same ways. The dissolute man may boast of his life of evil pleasure, may tell us that no punishment has overtaken him; the greedy man may shew us his hoard of wealth,

^k Heb. xiii. 5.

^l Luke xv. 20.

and may deride him that is lenient or open-handed; the proud man may tell us of his titles and honours, and may look down on those who are humble and of a low estate; the godless man may say that he is as blessed as the religious man; and he that leaves the holy Church of the Lord, and follows the worship which has been set up by man, may tell us that his is God's altar, and that Christ and salvation do abide with him. These are among the common temptations with which Christians, in Christ's true flock and fold, are now every day tempted and tried; and every day "dreamers of dreams^m" will arise, and cry unto you, 'Come after us; follow in our ways; there is gain in them, there is delight in them, there is honour in them, there is the Lord in them!' This is what man will say unto you, does say unto you, in one way or other, daily, and perhaps frequently in the day. But the Lord God says in the chapter read to-day concerning these "dreamers of dreams," "thou shalt not hearken unto themⁿ." We will not, then, walk or take part with these. They may tell us that they are not vexed more than other men, or they may say that they succeed better than other men. Whether they do or do not, the Lord says, "hearken not unto them." They may seem to prosper; if so, no doubt their prosperity is allowed to them in order to prove and to establish our constancy in the Lord; and the more so if we are troubled, while they prosper. The world may be so ordered as to

^m Deut. xiii. 1.ⁿ Ibid. 8.

go easy with them, it may be as smooth as a happy dream, all that they wish may come to their hand, and more than their hand can hold; all that they have may be spent foolishly, or even wickedly, more in opposition to Christ's word and worship than in upholding it; all this may be done in the sight of God, and He may hold His peace, and may keep back that man's condemnation.

But does the Lord in truth love these opposers and gainsayers? does He reckon them among His servants? Most assuredly not. There can be no doubt at all, to any one who knows the Word of the Lord, but that these are walking in "slippery places," and are in courses wherein they may readily work out their own downfall.

Still the Lord God can make a use of these broken vessels. We look upon the sound and painted side of them, and by their seeming prosperity the Lord exercises and strengthens us in steadfastness. The Lord is trying whether we are still contented to follow God, while the reward seems to be given rather to those who desert Him or oppose Him. The Lord tries us whether we indeed love the Lord only for His own sake; because uprightness and peace of conscience are to be found in obedience to His will; because we have a sure trust that we shall find in humbleness and in constancy our pardon and acceptance through Jesus Christ, and whether we do indeed "love Him Who first loved us ^p."

Knowing, then, the way unto our Father's house, we will not go out of it. We may be told that the Lord may look cold upon us, and that He may bestow His favours upon those who are less dutiful, or who may wander at their will. Let us not heed these "words of that prophet or that dreamer of dreams;" we know the way, and we know also that our feet have, by God's grace to us, been set therein. We will not leave it; we know that it will bring us to His gate, and we have a sure trust that when we come unto His mansions, the Lord our Redeemer will acknowledge us, that He will open to us when we "knock," because in quietness, in obedience, in patience, and in faith we looked unto the course laid down before our feet, and in prayer, in self-denial, and in watchfulness stedfastly set our faces to follow Jesus Christ; "forgetting those things which are behind," and looking only to pass our days in serving the Lord, that so of His mercy, and for Christ's sake, we may serve Him hereafter in heaven, being made like His angels for ever.

These seem to me, then, my brethren, to be some of the beautiful lessons which the text, from the chapter ordered by the Church of Jesus to be read this day, brings home to our hearts.

As far as I have been able to lay before you any good out of the teaching which has been sent to you to-day in the Word of God, I trust that you will accept it with thankful hearts.

Remember, then, always, whenever you may see those in safety or prosperity who walk in paths which are not right in the sight of God, or which are not warranted or ordained of God, when you see these in prosperity and in this world's peace, remember then, that as far as you are concerned with them, besides your duty to pray for them, remember that they are proofs and exercises of your constancy; both to strengthen you in steadfastness, and also to let you be an example, "a light to lighten" others, who may not be so strong in the Lord as you are yourselves. Every instance of prosperous wickedness is a call on you to shew forth enduring uprightness. Remember Him who hath said, "The Lord God will help Me, therefore shall I not be confounded; therefore have I set my face like a flint, and I know that I shall not be ashamed^r." Steadfastly, therefore, "set the face to go to Jerusalem^s;" with an open and true heart follow the Lord in all His appointed ordinances; beseech Him to keep you steadfast therein; so that, whether in high or low estate, you may be found in obedience under every temptation, and thus may never lose the hope of the gracious redemption of His Son Jesus Christ, nor the humble trust that you are not shut out from the pardoning love of your Father which is in heaven.

^r Isa. l. 7.

^s Luke ix. 51.

SERMON XXX.

Whit-Sunday.

ACTS xix. 9.

But when divers were hardened, and believed not, but spake evil of that way before the multitude, he departed from them, and separated the disciples.

THESE words shew perhaps the first appearance of dissent from the Church of the Lord Christ; and how St. Paul took his disciples and separated them from the gainsayers.

As we are directed by the Church to read these words specially on Whit-Sunday, in the Lessons for the day, we will first consider what the Church on this day commemorates, and will then return to consider more particularly the matter contained in the text.

On Whit-Sunday the Church commemorates in an especial manner the descent of the Holy Ghost on the apostles, who were the first bishops in the Church of Christ; and by whom her ordinances, rites, and customs were in the first instance established and set in order.

Our Lord Jesus Christ had stated, before He ascended up into heaven, that it was expedient for

Him to go away, and that He should now leave His apostles, but that He should send the Comforter unto them^a. That He would send the Comforter unto them was a promise which He graciously made more than once. From the words which our Lord spake unto His followers, the apostles, just before He went up into heaven, and when He had commissioned His Church also to go forth into the world and teach all nations, it was easy to perceive that this Comforter was one Person in the same Ever-blessed and Eternal Being, the true and living God, in whom Christ also Himself in His Godhead is One. Now His words are, while He was leaving them, "Lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world^b." A promise by which the Lord Christ plainly shewed that He Himself, in the Comforter, would be the leader, the governing head, and the support of His Church, not only while the apostles themselves were alive, but that His Church should stand, in their successors, as long as the world endureth; and that He would be with it, until He should come again in judgment, into His vineyard, to reckon with His husbandmen, and to receive His fruits.

Now, then, as the Holy Ghost is one with Christ and with the Father in the holy and undivided Godhead, and as by receiving the Holy Spirit, the apostles became the very dwelling-places of the Comforter, and

^a John xvi. 7.

^b Matt. xxviii. 20.

were therefore said to be “the temples of the Holy Ghost^c,” we may reasonably suppose that some great changes would take place in the feelings and the judgment of the apostles, after they had obtained this high gift of the indwelling of the Holy Spirit within their hearts. Accordingly this change is very plain to be seen in them by any one who reads the Word of God with his mind turned to that point.

While the apostles walked with Christ, they may be seen to have leant on Him, as it were, in all cases. In every temptation, if the Lord is not with them, they fail, and shew worldly tempers. Sometimes they give way to wrath, and would call down fire upon the heads of their adversaries^d; sometimes they shew fear, and dread lest they should perish^e; at one time they forsook the Lord, and fled away^f; while the most zealous of them denied Christ altogether, and with oaths and adjurations called God to witness that his false denial was a truth^g. Often they shewed want of faith, often great darkness of mind, great dulness as to the things of God, connected with a worldly spirit.

There is one great comfort in this display of human feeling on the part of the apostles while Christ was with them on earth, and the Church may build upon it a perpetual hope, because we see it constantly met on the part of our Lord God with unchangeable forbearance, gentle dealings, love, and

^c 1 Cor. vi. 19.

^d Luke ix. 54.

^e Matt. viii. 25.

^f Mark xiv. 50.

^g Ibid. v. 71.

tenderness towards them all; so that such as, in His Church, have, among their failings, humble and willing hearts, such as still are leaning on and following after Christ, may trust also to receive from the Lord the same gentle guidance, correction, and love which He continually shewed forth towards His apostles.

But as soon as the Holy Ghost had rested on the apostles, as soon as the Comforter had come unto them, and the Spirit of the Lord God had visited them, what a marked and mighty change may we perceive in the sayings and in the conduct of these sacred men. Immediately all fear was cast aside; they stood forth the champions as well as the bishops of the Church; they set themselves advisedly “in the forefront of the hottest battle^h ;” they exalted the cross in the sight of the world, and bore it forward as the standard of the Lord; they proclaimed themselves as the servants of Christ, and as the upholders, in chief, of His Gospels, against all the disappointed malice of the Jews, against all the scorn and angry pride of the Romans—the conquerors of the world. They preached Christ against all the powers that there were in the earth, and crying, “Who is on the Lord’s sideⁱ?” they commanded their followers to cast down their idolatries and their old religion, and to come forth from their stains, their pollution, their beloved uncleannesses, to abash their pride, to give

^h 2 Sam. xi. 15.

ⁱ Exod. xxxii. 26.

up their covetousness, to soften their hard-heartedness, and to trample under foot their long-established iniquities; their habitual lusts, and to walk an humble, an enduring, a self-denying, a self-accusing life before God, by faith in the promises of the crucified Jesus. They called on all men, through persecutions, and, as it well might be, through tortures and a hastened death itself, to avow themselves believers in the Lord Christ and His servants unto the end. This was the course of their preaching, and also the course in which they shaped their lives; it was the course, moreover, in which they laid down their lives before they again were with Jesus their Lord.

My brethren, what a marked change was there in all this! How fear was cast off in the strength of the Spirit which was dwelling in them! how all flying away from the Lord, all denying of Christ, was laid aside, and instead thereof, how great was their speed in flying from the ways of this world! what a struggle was there to escape from its follies and its vices! how boldly did they step forward to deny the world! what a constant and resolute joy did they feel in denying themselves! how entirely was fulfilled the promise of the Lord, "The Comforter, which is the Holy Ghost, whom the Father will send in My Name, He shall teach you all things^j!"

It was the same in their faith. Before the Spirit

^j John xiv. 26.

visited them, they doubted, after the Crucifixion they despaired. The Crucifixion had indeed fulfilled so many plain and clear prophecies to the very letter, that to a mind not very dull, not in a low state of spiritual darkness, that event would have been one of the most direct proofs that Jesus, the beloved Son, had been offered up as a sacrifice for the sins of man, and that His kingdom was that spiritual kingdom in which they, as the first ordained servants of the Lord in His Church, were the beginning of God's universal reign in the world. But they saw not these spiritual things, they looked only on the doctrine of a Saviour in the spirit of worldlings; and when they said in their sorrow, "We trusted that it had been He which should have redeemed Israel^k," they thought chiefly of being redeemed from the rule of the Romans, and they despaired.

But what was their feeling after they had received the Holy Spirit? Their courage under God straightway led them to proclaim the Lord and His Gospel in the face of the heathen rulers, in opposition to the powers of the earth, and "spiritual wickedness in high places^l." Their "eyes were opened," and they set up the Lord in faith, because they felt the Spirit within them. Their language is, "We know whom we have believed^m;" and urged on by this knowledge, by this certainty that in Christ the Lord they should

^k Luke xxiv. 21.

^l Eph. vi. 12.

^m 2 Tim. i. 12.

“be more than conquerorsⁿ,” and that of God the Lord they should never be “forsaken^o,” they went forward glorying in their burden, bearing the weight of the cross without bending; knowing that the Gospel of the Lord would triumph, knowing also that they should die, and in this world should be cut off, but rejoicing in their end, because they also knew that they were mercifully called of the Lord to be His immediate servants; knowing that like their Master they went through their own blood unto everlasting glory with God.

This knowledge gave them strength; but they knew, moreover, that their blood would not be shed in vain; they knew that it would, as it were, water the Church, and that the “Vine” would spring the stronger, and bear more fruit therefrom. They knew that if they glorified God^p, and “were faithful unto death^q,” so by their example millions in time to come would accept the Word of God, and would be fed in the fold of the Lord Jesus Christ. They suffered willingly, because they knew that they were appointed by the mercy of the Lord to bring the world unto the faith in the Redeemer, that by their labours and endurance the whole earth would come unto her Maker, and that she would leave her idols, and the sins which follow idolatry, that she might live in communion with God; that in His ear she would

ⁿ Rom. viii. 37.

^p John xxi. 19.

^o 2 Cor. iv. 9.

^q Rev. ii. 10.

pray, that the grace of the Lord Jesus would be bestowed in answer to her supplications, and that the promises of the Lord would be remembered and conferred. So that souls "like the sand which is upon the seashore^r" for multitude, would hereafter enter into the mercy of the Lord, and Christians, hallowed by the gracious and undeserved atonement of the Lord Jesus Christ, would hereafter pass continually into the pardon of the Lord, and that here on earth, and hereafter in heaven, the kingdom of God would increase and be full.

Such, then, was the change brought to pass in the hearts of the apostles when the Holy Ghost had descended on them. Now we, my brethren, are the same Church which the apostles founded; in regular succession, our bishops, priests, and deacons are sprung from the consecration of the apostles, who were the first bishops in this Church which Christ founded before He ascended up into heaven, unto which Church He gave His promise of love and protection for ever, as long as the world should continue. But if we are the same Church, and guided by the same Holy Spirit, we ought to shew forth to man something of the same sacred character which made it "a light to lighten the Gentiles^s."

Let us, then, end this discourse by looking at the posture in which the world stands towards the Church of Christ in this realm, and by enquiring what is,

^r Gen. xxii. 17.

^s Luke ii. 32.

and ought to be, the carriage of the Church towards those who do not obey her, as the offspring and the protected child of the Holy Spirit of God.

In this country some continue in the Church which Christ ordained, some do not. We are in that Church, which was built up by Christ and His apostles, and our doctrines and services are founded upon the whole Word of God, as it has been mercifully delivered unto us by our Lord Jesus, and as it has been interpreted by His immediate followers.

Others, however, there are who will not abide the whole strictness of the Word, nor adhere to the course which the Church of Christ follows. These have departed from us, and they follow after men whose preaching they have greatly admired, and who told them moreover that they were inspired persons. Men, nevertheless, these are, who were not afraid to lay their hands upon the Ark, and to alter what the Church has from the beginning ruled, and what she knows that Christ, and His Apostles after Him, set up and ordained.

Now these things we see on the earth; nor must we be surprised that we see them. Because, as the Jewish Church was warned that "false prophets" and "dreamers of dreams" should arise, who should try and prove by their idolatrous teaching and their lying miracles whether God's people was indeed faithful unto the Lord, so St. Peter and the other apostles, and, moreover, our Lord Christ Himself, warns us that we should be tried and have our

constancy proved also by “divisions amongst us^t,” by “false teachers” and “false Christs^u.” We are taught and forewarned that “there shall be false teachers among you, who shall privily bring in damnable heresies,”—false opinions, opinions hurtful, that is, and blameable,—“and many shall follow their pernicious ways, by reason of whom the way of truth shall be evil spoken of. And through covetousness shall they with feigned words make merchandise of you^x.” “Presumptuous are they,” adds the Apostle, “self-willed; they are not afraid to speak evil of dignities. Whereas angels, which are greater in power and might, bring not railing accusation against them before the Lord. But these speak evil of things that they understand not. . . . Spots are they, and blemishes. . . . A heart have they exercised with covetous practices; . . which have forsaken the right way, and are gone astray, following the way of Balaam, who loved the wages of unrighteousness^y.”

Now this plain prophecy of St. Peter, which is as clear as if he was now living in the world, ought to abate any surprise, when we see any of these “presumptuous and self-willed” men coming amongst us with their “great swelling words of vanity^z.” We ought only to say of them, These are the tempters, of whom we have been mercifully forewarned by the Lord; we ought to expect them; we ought to pray

^t 1 Cor. xi. 18.

^u Matt. xxiv. 24.

^x 2 Pet. ii. 1—3.

^y Ibid. 10—15.

^z Ibid. 19.

against them, that they may gain but few ; we ought to pray for them, that their heart may be turned back again to humbleness and to obedience. Moreover, while they do come, the Church ought closely to examine herself, to be very jealous of herself, so as to make herself sure, as far as she can be sure, that she does, neither by her teaching, or practices within herself, nor by her carriage towards those that are without, give any temptation or excuse to any of her fold to wander from her.

I will now, then, consider, with what fairness I can, the manner in which each of these parties act, one towards the other, in order that we may see (making allowances for those weaknesses which all parties, while in the flesh, will have to repent of) which do keep their way most thoroughly within the Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Now, my brethren, I will take upon me to say that all the ordinances, which the Church in England uses, ever have been used since the days when the apostles governed the Church of Christ. What, however, is seen among those who leave the Church ? They say that they are led out by the Holy Ghost. This, indeed, is most certain,—if they are led out by any other spirit ; if they are led by self-opinion, by pride ; if they are led out by any desire of profit, “to make a merchandise of you* ;” if they are led out by a desire to gain fame and reputation among

* 2 Pet. ii. 3.

you, as the teachers of "some new thing;" if they are led out by any worldly spirit of any kind whatsoever,—then it is quite certain that they are led into very great spiritual danger indeed. But they say that they are led by the Holy Ghost. Now whither are they led? "By their fruits ye shall know them^b." What fruits does this leading produce? Some are led to deny baptism to their children; some are led to deny both sacraments to their people; some are led to deny that Jesus Christ is God the Lord; many of them are led into this grand denial of Christ. All of them are led to have no priesthood among them, handed down from those to whom the sacraments and promises were first bestowed; and, therefore, where the Lord's Supper is offered to their people, there are the bread and wine consecrated by men who have not received the fullest possible warrant to consecrate, and who have not been duly ordained unto that office.

Now where, my brethren, among these parties, would any humble and faithful mind seek to find the Holy Spirit and the Lord Jesus? Would he seek the Lord among those who are all separating and dividing one from another, or among those who have from the days of Christ carefully kept alive all the ordinances and doctrines which the Lord and His saints first delivered to the Church? Would he seek the Lord among those who deny Christ, or

^b Matt. vii. 16.

among those who worship Him? Among those who place His sacraments in the hands of such as are bold enough to handle them, or among those who have received the sacraments and the ministry as handed down to them from the apostles?

Would he seek the Lord among those who in part, or entirely, keep back the sacraments from their people, or among those who, both in Baptism and in the Supper of the Lord, observe to do what the Lord has commanded?

Does it not seem reasonable to say, 'All these people, all believing different and contradictory things, cannot all be taught by the one great Spirit of Truth; because one way alone can be the true way, and whatever differs therefrom must be more or less false, and the teachers thereof cannot therefore have the Holy Ghost.' Is it not reasonable to say, 'All these oppositions cannot come from one true God, but they may all easily come from one false spirit; because a false spirit may be false in many ways, and may therefore lead people into many different false faiths; indeed, as we well know, there are many ways of going wrong, and there can be but one way of going right. But which is the way most likely to be true, that which has been upheld ever since the apostles' days, and which was set on foot by them; or those ways which have been only set up of late by men, and which, being set up, are found to lead only to fresh divisions and contentions? Which is most like a Jerusalem, the city

which is builded at unity with itself^c? Which is most like a thing ordained of God?

These, then, my brethren, are some of the plain questions which any pious and humble mind, wishing to be in the guidance of the Holy Ghost, and to stand undoubtedly within the promises of the Lord Jesus, will ask when he sees what is in the Church of Christ, and when he observes what is found outside her boundaries. I will say nothing of the learning to be met with in the Church, nor will I charge those who oppose her with want of reading, though I think much may be urged on that side, and that most of the dissent we see arises only from want of learning in the first place; but I would suggest that, looking merely to the foundation of the Church, as it is most certainly founded in Christ, and looking to the general agreement of doctrine in Gospel teaching to be met with in the Church, and then noticing the various and opposing beliefs and practices to be seen among the sects which leave her altar, I would suggest that every quiet, obedient, and humble mind would say, ‘Shall I seek the Holy Spirit in the Church which Christ ordained and set on foot, and to which He gave His promises and sacraments, or shall I seek for Him out of that Church? And if I seek for the Spirit out of the Church, in which of the differing and opposing sects am I to find Him?’

^c Ps. cxxii. 3.

Let us now, then, observe the temper in which the opponents of the Church carry themselves towards the Church, and that also in which the Church behaves towards her opponents. Am I wrong, then, if I say that we are treated with much railing and evil accusation? Some there are who will not hesitate to say that the Church loses more souls than she saves. If this is true, then it is an unaccountable thing to me why the merciful Lord Christ ever set her on foot; because the Lord must have foreseen all that she would do, and it is an unaccountable thing that the Saviour Christ departing, should set up a Church which was to destroy the souls of men, and to lead mankind into that very destruction, to save them from which He had laid down His life. It is more unaccountable still that the Lord should yet, down to this very day, have maintained and preserved, against all her enemies, a Church which was fighting constantly against Himself, which was wasting and destroying His flock, and that He should now have so maintained this Church from His ascending up into heaven for more than eighteen hundred years, against all that man or Satan could do against her! Yet I have heard this said nevertheless. But what sort of temper is this? Besides, who is the judge? The Bible says, "Judge not^d," "condemn not;" but here is judgment and condemnation too; but surely this is to "cast the stone" before any proof

^d Luke vi. 37.

of sin has been made, for the proof cannot be, till we all stand before God in His judgment-day!

Now on this point what is the language which the Church holds? I never heard her ministers say that dissent lost more souls than it saved. Of course we see, and we lament, the spirit which too often leads people away from Christ's fold; we see that it is often a spirit of pride, and that this leads to general headstrongness of temper and obstinacy, which are tempers of mind contrary to the Gospel. We see oftentimes that an impatience of the forms and services which the Church used from the very first, makes some leave us, as was prophesied of them; and this also we think irreverent and very unsafe. We see often that an impatience of prayer, and confession, and a love of preaching, and a desire of being stirred up and excited by strong appeals to their feelings, that these things often lead many astray; and then we lament that any should be found to prefer man to God; yet this is done wherever the sermon is preferred to the prayers. In prayer you yourselves come before God; you bring to the Lord your sins, and beseech Him to pardon them; you bring to God your wants, and beseech Him to supply them; you then beg the Lord to have mercy on the sins of the whole congregation, to supply the wants of all of us spiritually and bodily; to be very merciful to us, and to all men; to uphold us here in peace and comfort, to guide us out of all temptations, to blot out our sins,

when we die, to receive us into everlasting forgiveness ; and all this on account, not of our deservings and merits, but for the sake of the Saviour Christ, and on account of His Blood shed for us on the Cross. This is what we do when we pray together in the Church. But when you hear me, or any other person preach, you hear, of course, the words of a man, more or less skilled, more or less learned, still only the words of a man ; so whoever prefers the sermon before the service of prayer, prefers to listen to some man, rather than to go and "meet the Lord." Now this is one very common reason why people depart from their Church. They prefer some preacher before God and His ordinances.

My brethren, the Church sees these great and heavy back-slidings, and sees how dissent often springs from them ; but she does not then "judge" and "condemn ;" because that is not her part or duty to judge those that are without^e. The Church knows wherefore she is appointed, to lead the flock in the road which the Lord has laid down, quietly, steadfastly, in the spirit of prayer and confession ; but she well knows that she is not to rush into the throne of God herself, to usurp the judgment-seat, and then to judge, and to pass her condemnation upon those who differ from her or oppose her. This she knows is no place for her ; but she leaves the judgment and condemnation of His creatures in the hands of the Almighty God who made them. There she leaves it ;

^e See 1 Cor. v. 12, 13.

and she betakes herself to that in which she is strong, because the Lord is unboundedly merciful,—she betakes herself to constant supplication. And, among others, for whom does she pray? Every time you meet in God's house you pray for those very persons who would overset your altars. In every Church service we pray Christ "to bring into the way of truth all such as have erred and are deceived;" we beseech Christ to "forgive our enemies, persecutors, and slanderers, and to turn their hearts;" we beg the Lord to "have mercy upon all men;" we beseech Christ that "all who call themselves Christians may be led into the way of truth, and may hold the faith in unity of spirit, in the bond of peace, and in righteousness of life." Now these perpetual prayers relate very much to our dissenting brethren, and are in fact offered up for them. While we are "reviled, we revile not again," and being spoken against, we answer not; but we do what we are commanded to do, we pray: and, my brethren, I beseech you, when these prayers come round in the service, then remember with me those who have erred and are gone astray, and lift up your hearts to God for them. There are many more marks by which we may feel assured that within the Church we may trust to be with the Spirit of the Most High, but I will now only add how I believe we ought to walk, if we would follow our Lord, when we are opposed by those who leave the Church,—we must be in prayer for them.

A person who has left the Church which Christ has appointed is in a condition of much doubt and fear. He leaves because he follows his own judgment against that which the apostles, or which the Lord Himself, declared and appointed. This is following self-opinion a very long way indeed, yet this is undoubtedly his situation. He “replieth against God^f!” This is an awful position in which to stand. Therefore he ought not to meet with anger on our part, nor bickerings, nor contention, but he should have our prayers to God for him. In our intercourse with him we should shew him at once our sorrow for him, and our tenderness towards him; we should give him our mildest entreaties and warnings to consider his situation; we should remind him that Christ did establish a spiritual rule on earth, and that He still maintains it; we should say, ‘You are not in that rule. Christ gave into the hands of His Church His holy sacraments; you are not within His Church, are you not without His sacraments? Will acting Christ’s sacraments make them Christ’s sacraments? As long as this question can stand, is your worship a safe worship? Is there not a safe worship for you? Was it not left for you and for all men by the Lord? Is it not kept open for you to this very hour, by the Lord? Return into it; come forth out of the wilderness; come forth!’”

To mild argument add the power of prayer. Never

^f Rom. ix. 20.

forget to beseech the Lord to enlighten the mind of the wanderer, and to bring him back. This is the manner in which the Church would have you meet opposition and gainsaying. It is the manner in which the Lord Christ met it. He called not down "fire upon His adversaries^g," neither did He summon from heaven "twelve legions of angels^h," but He spent whole nights in prayer for man.

Lastly, to these prayers add example. The Lord Christ is our pattern, as well as our head and spiritual comfort. His example must be kept. To this end prayers, and "nights of prayers," are in many cases needful, if we would have grace to approach His example of pureness, kindness, truth, and long-suffering patience. That it may be followed, both for your own sakes, and for the sakes of all with whom you have to do, be fervent in prayer for yourselves, for thus shall you in larger and larger measures receive the Holy Spirit of God, and be governed thereby.

^g Luke ix. 54, 55.

^h Matt. xxvi. 53.

SERMON XXXI.

Trinity Sunday.

ST. MATT. iii. 16, 17.

Lo, the heavens were opened unto Him, and He saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove, and lighting upon Him; and lo, a Voice from heaven, saying, This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.

ON Trinity Sunday the Church departs from her usual custom, and does not take her second Lesson from the course in the Calendar, but appoints the third chapter of St. Matthew's Gospel as the second Lesson for this day. We may suppose, therefore, that she has made this choice with a view to bring before our minds the doctrine of the Trinity, which we assert in an especial manner on this occasion; which doctrine, as you know, is the existence of three divine Persons in the ever-blessed Godhead,—Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. In the chapter appointed to be read to-day we find this doctrine demonstrated in the history of our Lord's baptism, which is told us in the fourteenth verse.

In St. Mark's Gospel we have the same event in our Saviour's life mentioned in a shorter manner, but nearly in the same terms.

In St. John's Gospel the event of our Lord's bap-

tism is not recorded, but it is distinctly referred to as having taken place.

St. Mark's account of this transaction is as follows:—"Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee, and was baptized of John in Jordan. And straightway coming up out of the water, He saw the heavens opened, and the Spirit, like a dove, descending upon Him: and there came a voice from heaven, saying, Thou art My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased^a."

St. John's reference to this occurrence is given thus:—"And John bare record, saying, I saw the Spirit descending from heaven like a dove, and it abode upon Him. And I knew Him not; but He that sent me to baptize with water, the same said unto me, Upon whom thou shalt see the Spirit descending and remaining on Him, the same is He which baptizeth with the Holy Ghost: and I saw and bare record that this is the Son of God^b."

St. Luke's description of the baptism of our Lord is contained in one short but remarkable sentence. His words are, "Jesus also being baptized, and praying, the heaven was opened, and the Holy Ghost descended in a bodily shape like a dove upon Him, and a voice came from heaven which said, Thou art My beloved Son, in Thee I am well pleased^c." The words here introduced by St. Luke, "in a bodily shape," are material.

Painters have taken these words literally, and

^a Mark i. 9—11.

^b John i. 32—34.

^c Luke iii. 21, 22.

when they attempt to make a representation of the Holy Spirit, have commonly taken the dove as the proper emblem; either thinking themselves warranted in so doing by this sentence from St. Luke, or conceiving, from the meekness, the affectionate and guileless nature of the dove, that it is a becoming representation of the Holy Ghost. It is, however, by some considered that this passage does not mean that the Holy Ghost was in the actual shape of a dove, but only that it took some luminous and definite form; was a body of light, in short, similar to that which originally resided in the temple of Jerusalem in the Holy of Holies, and that in its mode of descent only it was like a dove, in quivering down upon the person of our Lord.

The passage, however, in which all the Evangelists are in agreement, contains a clear intimation, indeed a demonstration, of the doctrine of three Persons in the Godhead. We find "the heavens opened," and the Holy Ghost assuming some bodily appearance, descending therefrom, and resting upon Christ our Redeemer, who being now in the water, was praying in His baptism. In this representation we have two Persons manifested to our eyes, while the existence of the third, Who asserts Himself to be the Father, is declared unto us, Who, though not seen, is nevertheless distinctly heard, saying, "This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased."

In revelation we have no call to press further than the word takes us, because that is revealed which is

sufficient for us ; so also we are for the most part in danger of falling when we advance beyond what we are told, for then we are gone forward out of the light. We may not, then, ask why the third Person in the Godhead still remained invisible during this manifestation of the other two. We are wrong, indeed, if we ask this, because it seems to be setting up our judgments against the wisdom of the Lord ; since, assuming that one purpose of the Godhead in this transaction was the assertion and manifestation of the Trinity, then we have that doctrine clearly demonstrated by the event as it is recorded by the Evangelists, because seeing the two Persons in the Godhead, and hearing the third, is as much an evidence of the existence of the three as though the whole number had stood in sight.

In the circumstance, however, that the Father appeared not, but remained invisible, we find an agreement with another very remarkable portion of Scripture. When God called Moses, and sent him to Pharaoh to lead forth the Israelites out of Egypt, Moses said unto God, "Behold, when I come unto the children of Israel, and shall say unto them, The God of your fathers hath sent me unto you, and they shall say unto me, What is His name? what shall I say unto them? And God said unto Moses, I AM THAT I AM : and He said, Thus shalt thou say unto the children of Israel, I AM hath sent me unto you^d." In this passage we see the same determination

^d Exodus iii. 13, 14.

maintained, a determination to remain incomprehensible, to be a subject for faith. The bush to Moses seemed to be on fire, but we may believe that no fire was there, because it was 'not consumed;' rather, we may believe, it was the same visible and glorious Body of Light, a portion of which the Holy Spirit assumed when He resided in the temple, when He descended on our Saviour Christ, and afterwards when He came down on the apostles at Pentecost. But the Father was still heard only; there was no appearance, but only a voice. In the same way we read in the Book of Exodus that when Moses besought the Lord to shew unto him His glory, the Lord refused, and said, "Thou canst not see My Face; for there shall no man see Me and live*."

To human reason it would appear to have been better and more convincing that the Lord should have manifested Himself, and also should have declared His title; but through every revelation of God's will or purposes, it has seemed good to the Lord to demand belief, to compel our reason to submit to His Word, and to demand this as one condition of our salvation. We may therefore presume that even until the last day of the glorious appearance of the Lord, it may be the will of God to render His revelations of Himself of a mixed nature; partly, that is, matter of direct and obvious proof, partly also a subject for faith. The doctrine that more than one

* Exod. xxxiii. 20.

Person existeth in the Godhead is common in the Bible. Indeed, the first verse of that book contains it, and we may reasonably suppose that the Church was moved to place the first chapter of Genesis for the first Lesson on this day, partly on that very account. In the words, "In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth," we have the doctrine of more than one Person in the Godhead, provided we translate according to the original Hebrew. In Hebrew the word *El* stands for God, and the word *Elohim* for Gods, in the plural number; and in the first verse of the Bible the plural word *Elohim* is used, being "The Gods created the heaven and the earth." This is a clear assertion that more than one Person existeth in the Godhead. When Moses useth this phrase, and then afterwards proclaims to the Jews, "Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God is one Lord^f," it is plain that he must have been divinely enlightened on two points in the Godhead. It must have been revealed to him that there was more than one Person in the divine nature, and also that these Persons were existing in one mysterious Godhead.

In the eighteenth chapter of Genesis, however, we are led to believe that Moses was not only taught that in the Godhead dwelt in union more than one divine Person, but also that the number of those Persons was three. I will rehearse to you some parts of that chapter, and will shew you as I proceed,

^f Deut. vi. 4.

that Three Persons, each recognised as divine by Abraham, appeared unto him, and that he addressed them sometimes as One Lord, sometimes as Three, and this indifferently, as though either mode of address was equally proper. “And the Lord appeared unto Abraham in the plains of Mamre, and he lift up his eyes, and lo, Three Men stood by him: and when he saw Them, he ran to meet Them from the tent door, and bowed himself toward the ground^s.” Here we find that the Lord appeared veiled in the similitude of three men, not in the likeness of one. Abraham, on his part, bowed down in adoration equally to all, and said, “My Lord, if now I have found favour in Thy sight, pass not away, I pray Thee, from Thy servant^h.” So far he addresses the divine Three as one man, then immediately, and without any intervening sentence, he speaks as to a number, saying, “Let a little water, I pray you, be fetched, and wash your feet, and rest yourselves under the tree; and I will fetch a morsel of bread, and comfort ye your hearts; after that ye shall pass on. And they said, So do as thou hast saidⁱ.” Here we find Abraham addressing the Three, and the answer is given by the whole party, as though each possessed an equal authority, not by one only, as though He was superior to the other two.

Abraham having now made a hasty preparation, placed some food before the sacred Three, when we

^s Gen. xviii. 1, 2.

^h Ib. 3.

ⁱ Ib. 4, 5.

find the conversation turned to another subject, but carried on exactly in the same manner, the Three Persons sometimes addressed as if they were One, and then immediately afterwards being recognised as Three; and this very peculiar circumstance runs through the whole interview. "And he stood by them under the tree, and they did eat; and they said unto him, Where is Sarah thy wife? And Abraham said, Behold in the tent. And He said, Behold, I will certainly return unto thee according to the time of life; and, lo, Sarah thy wife shall have a son^k." It is not necessary to pursue this discourse further; throughout the chapter the same peculiarity exists. In the whole of this communing of the Lord with Abraham, the divine Three are sometimes considered and addressed by Abraham as One Being, sometimes, and in the very same sentence, as Three. It is plain, also, that Abraham knew that he was in the presence of the Lord God. First, because he so addresses the sacred Personages who stood before him; secondly, because, in this eighteenth chapter, we have the promise of a son to Sarah, the renewal of the Lord's promise to Abraham, which is recorded in the fifteenth chapter immediately preceding; and, lastly, because when the Lord explained to Abraham His intention to destroy the cities of the plain, Sodom and Gomorrah, Abraham instantly fell into prayer to God, and besought

^k Gen. xviii. 8—10.

mercy of the holy Three who were with him, in that continued, that trembling, and affectionate supplication with which the chapter concludes. Now it seems hardly possible to account for this use of Three for One and One for Three, and that quite indifferently, except on the ground that either manner of address was equally proper.

I will end these remarks by turning your attention upon two verses in the first chapter of Genesis, where you will again find the same use of the plural and singular terms indifferently taken, and each held as equally applicable to the Lord God. It is written, "And God said, Let Us make man after Our likeness;" and then it is added directly afterwards, "So God created man in His own image, in the image of God created He him¹." Here we perceive the Creator Himself speaking of His own nature in the plural number, and in the next verse designating Himself as being single and one.

I have brought forward these passages from the Old Testament because the doctrine of a Trinity in Unity is frequently considered as being only to be found in the New Testament, whereas it is evident that it was shadowed out and indicated from the beginning, and, like other revelations pertaining to the Godhead, became only more clear, and was exalted into a direct article of faith, exactly as the Word of God itself became more clear, and was

¹ Gen. i. 26, 27.

graciously made of more plain and direct interpretation.

In the New Testament the doctrine of three Persons mysteriously connected in One sacred Nature is openly given to us. The passage which forms my text is considered as a kind of practical proof, a demonstration of this doctrine. The Church so esteems it, and beyond doubt in all plain reading it is difficult to view it in any other manner. We may also consider the transfiguration of our Lord, as told us in the Gospels of St. Matthew and St. Luke, as affording in a great degree a similar testimony. Our Lord having brought Peter, James, and John into a high mountain, was transfigured before them. "His face did shine as the sun, and His raiment was white as the light," and a bright cloud overshadowed them, and lo, a voice which said, "This is My beloved Son, in Whom I am well pleased^m." In this event we have again our Lord visible on earth, and though indeed we are not on this occasion told that the glorious appearance which overshadowed them was the Holy Spirit, nevertheless, as in the baptism of Jesus, it was present, and settled upon Him, while in the third place the voice was again heard from heaven, and with the same words as before. So that on the whole it appears in some main points a very similar transaction.

I will not here detain you by rehearsing the many

^m Matt. xvii. 1—5.

well-known passages in the New Testament in which this doctrine is plainly implied or stated. I will only adduce two sentences which are indeed very familiar to you all, because while for that very reason I mention them, they may, whenever they recur to you, in addition to the spiritual comfort and sure trust which they bestow, confirm you also in the belief of this revealed doctrine of the Trinity in Unity. The first passage which I wish to notice is the common but beautiful and comprehensive blessing sometimes called the apostolic blessing: "The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Ghost, be with you all evermoreⁿ." Here you have the three Persons each mentioned, and placed in an equality one with the other in the same sentence, and each Person is mentioned as able to confer spiritual benefits belonging only to the Godhead. I do not see how any plain-judging person can read or hear this blessing without being convinced that the Apostle represents and believes each Person, Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, to be equally divine, and to be capable of bestowing equally divine aids and consolations. The other passage which I will mention is our Saviour's command relative to the Sacrament of Baptism, "Go ye and teach all nations, baptizing them in the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost^o."

ⁿ 2 Cor. xiii. 14.

^o Matt. xxviii. 19.

This command bears with it a strong assurance that the whole Three are co-equal. The world is to be brought to the knowledge of the Lord. How is this to be done? By baptizing the people in the Name of the Lord. All nations are, by baptism, to be dedicated to the Lord. They are baptized accordingly in His Name, and His style is given in full. This view makes the commandment appear reasonable and religious at the same time. Now suppose it were otherwise; suppose two of these titles belong to inferior beings, suppose two of the titles regard only some creatures of the Creator, how unmeaning and absurd the commandment appears; but besides this, how irreligious it becomes. If all men are to be dedicated to the Lord, how absurd to dedicate them, by the very same act, to two of God's creatures also. But beyond this, as I have said before, how irreligious would the proceeding become, and how likely to bring in the worship of those creatures, that is, to set on foot idolatry. When we remember that this order for baptism came from the lips of the pure Jesus, that it must be a truth itself, and that it is given us to lead us on to all truth, then to a plain reader no truth will seem to be deducible from it, but that there is a Trinity in the Godhead. These two sentences, if they stood alone in the Bible, are, in my eyes, enough of themselves to point out to us as a subject for our faith the doctrine of the Trinity.

That the Trinity is one God in Unity many texts enforce upon us. I will again mention only two.

Moses, as I mentioned before, writes thus: "Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God is one Lord^p;" St. John writes, "There are Three that bear record in heaven, the Father, the Word, and the Holy Ghost, and these Three are One^q."

I mention only these two, because it is needless to bring before you all the texts with which the Bible on this point abounds. But I may add the words of our Lord Christ, "I and My Father are One^r;" or we may read the Lord's description of Himself as being One God, where He declares of Himself in the Book of Exodus, "I am the Lord thy God, thou shalt have no other gods but Me^s." These texts clearly assert that there are Three Persons in the Godhead, nevertheless that they form in mysterious union the One true God. It may now be said, "How can these things be?" The answer is, How shall we know God till we shall see Him as He is? What may be the union, what the differences, what the coincidences, what the distinctions in the Godhead, has not been revealed to us, how then should we know them? Probably these are things which may not be revealed while this world exists. In the meantime, this doctrine stands as one of the trials of our faith. Reason cannot comprehend it: if we are proud of our reason, we shall be tempted to question it and to disbelieve it. If we are humble, and trust only in God's Word, we shall accept it, and shall bow

^p Deut. vi. 4. ^q 1 John v. 7. ^r John x. 30. ^s Exod. xx. 2, 3.

down in faith to whatever the Lord God hath revealed to us in His sacred Book.

Faith, implicit belief, is one of the grand conditions of salvation: it is that grace on which most part of the Christian foundation stands. This doctrine of the Trinity in Unity is one of the trials of faith. Wherever it is not accepted in reverent submission, there, as we must fear, is a heart not in Scriptural belief, consequently there is a heart in great danger.

I feel, my brethren, though there is much on this point left unsaid, I feel that my discourse has now attained a length sufficient for the time. I shall therefore bring it to its end. But my last caution, as resulting from it, shall be this. In all Scripture reading accept as true and as valuable every statement which is clearly and openly laid down; take as much as can be the plain sense, and do not look for far-fetched meanings and strained interpretations. Reading and hearing in this spirit, accept, as a decided truth, whatever you are told in the Word. If this doctrine, or that miracle, or any event surprises you, still never question what the Lord hath said. You do not understand it perhaps; is it likely that you should understand all you see, or all you hear, of the ways of the infinite wisdom of God? Self-sufficient and proud men that we are, which is most likely, that we should be blind and unskilful, or that God should be untrue? Let this thought make us humble, meek in mind, assenting as with the guileless innocence of children

to God's Word, "not answering again;" but thanking the Lord God that we have His Book, and consenting to whatever in His mercy He hath taught us therein. This is the temper which will render that Book a blessing to yourselves, and through you a blessing also to those who are round about you and with whom you have to do. May the God of mercy bestow this grace upon you all, so that in this world His true faith may spread and bear its good fruits: peace, namely, and all godliness, and that hereafter the world may be justified thereby, and Christ may plead for it and redeem it.



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